THE SPIRAL WAY

JOHN CORDELIER

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The Spiral Way

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The Spiral Way

Being

Meditations upon the Fifteen Mysteries of the Soul's Ascent

By

John Cordelier
Author of "The Path of the Eternal Wisdom"

New Edition, Revised

"Gyrans gyrando vadit spiritus"

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INTRODUCTION

That jewel in the making, the ever growing crystal of Divine Humanity, seems destined to reflect from every facet some new aspect of the infinitely various Being of God ; the inexhaustible simplicity of Christ. Each soul that is added to it, cut and polished by the sharp and steady action of grace, offers a fresh angle to the incoming Divine Light ; gives a fresh picture of its love to the world. Yet there is a unity in this variousness ; for all are centred on one point, each grows by the laws which rule the universal growth, each draws its very life from one sacred heart. They are one, because they belong to the mystical and eternal fellowship of Jesus. For each to live is Christ ; and to grow is to assimilate the simple yet difficult secret of His growth. They are many, since

to each His life in them is a separate and peculiar gift, taking character from the temperament through which it is received. Thus His mystical body of many members is built up in our midst.

To its share in the building of that body—to its part in that drama of growth—it is certain that the soul of man is dedicated in advance. Here is the spiritual vocation of the race: a vocation resisted only at the cost of a complete stagnation, of a rejecting of all that is enduring and significant, all that is beautiful and good. That tendency to Deity of which philosophers speak to us, is inherent in our living world of change. There is a Voice that cries to us out of the storm of Becoming: that demands our co-operation, inviting us to great surrender and great joy. The Spirit of Christ sweeps through the world on its journey to the Father: and in virtue of its supreme attraction, its compelling power, catches to itself every lesser

spirit on its path. It cries, "Follow! follow!" to recalcitrant life, lagging behind it: life, ever tending to turn on its own tracks, to be satisfied with something a little lower than its best possible, sinking back upon an inglorious and comfortable past. It entices, and it pursues. "He who loves, knows that Voice," said Thomas à Kempis; and he who hears it, is caught by that cosmic music into the deep enchantment of the lover, for in its cadence is the very sorcery of love. In its accents is celestial beauty; the magical appeal of ecstasy and pain, offering us the final choice between that generous surrender which is heaven and that terrified refusal which is hell. It speaks to us in every growing, changing thing; it speaks in the stars and in the shrouded fields; calling us to a conscious sharing in the mighty business of the spiritual world. It demands incarnation, and seeks for self-expression; not upon some far-off intangible plane of being,

but in the here-and-now experience of the race. And the virgin soul hidden somewhere within us recognises it; stirring in her slumbers, as though that insistent *Ave* of the Universe had reached her through the barriers of the flesh.

According to the deep saying of the theologians, the Father, primal and unconditioned Essence of the Godhead, can only know Himself as mirrored in the Son. The undeclared riches of Deity take form in the wisdom of His energetic Word; and God finds Himself in the Eternal Christ. So too the Son, our Friend and Lover, source and pattern of our perfection, broods eternally above humanity, and seeks to see himself mirrored in man's soul. And as from the ecstatic encounter of the two primal aspects of Reality there flashed into being a third form, the Holy Spirit of their Love, whereby the Trinity in Unity was made complete: so another Love, that mystic passion which interweaves

Divine and Human nature, is born of the encounter between the Eternal Christ and the spirit of man. This love it is which stings to life a latent thing within us, and sets in hand the supernatural drama of the soul's career.

Because of this all-powerful love, because of that community of interests which it operates, we are a part now of the pageant of Christ's glory: motes, transfigured by the effulgence of His mystical body, our separated lives surrendered to the unresting movement of His will. There comes a moment when a strange new growth begins in us: when we find that we are set on a new path, begin to ascend towards fresh levels of being, now supremely "natural" because inevitable for us, yet closed to our vision in the past. We see before us the footsteps of our companion, showing us where we must tread: passing by many terrible places where our little, human life could never go alone. He moves thus towards His goal, and we

must follow; for irresistible love has made us one with Him. He grows thus to His full stature, for He is Very Life: and we, desiring His gift of life in its abundance, must learn its secret if we can. Here, if ever, we see that Life in its wholeness, incarnate, free, and regnant; untainted by disharmonies, growing to its perfect consummation in God. Here the mystery of transcendence is disclosed to us: spirit flaming up and out, through the world of matter, to its goal. In Jesus, that spirit finds its perfect thoroughfare. But in us there is roadmaking to be done, the hard cutting of new paths: only to be accomplished in so far as we follow His methods and grow with His growth.

How, then, shall we grow? and what shall be the curve that marks our progress—that "way," as the mystics call it, which is a journey and a transmutation in one? Where, on the wide horizons or in the inaccessible heavens, lies the goal towards which

we are to hew a path? Did we ask this of eager, striving Nature, she would be hard-pressed perhaps to answer us; for her achievements seem to lie in all directions, stretching sheaf-like towards every point. Since God is not Height alone but Depth and Breadth, transcending yet transfusing all, Life in her flight to Him may take all pathways. Her outgoing, expansive tendency may everywhere achieve success, for He is the Point in which all lines must end. This we see, and all the wonder and the greatness of it: we stand awed and bewildered before her innumerable adjustments and contrivances, her exquisite and complicated arts.

Yet these achievements and these arts are not for us. High above life, yet utterly within it—transcending all its ever-changing beauty, yet that very beauty's energising soul—we discern the Eternal Christ; with whom and in whom we, since we are carried on Life's crest, must surely seek to

live. He reigns in virtue of a transcendent vitality, a summing up and excelling of Creation: and we can only achieve union with Him in so far as we are able to grow towards that most human and impassioned self-expression of the victorious life of God. But the transition is too difficult for us. We need a guide and a pathfinder, some merely human thing that went before us through the jungle, and made in our name the essential contact with Reality. We need in fact the natural simplicity of Mary to lead us to our supernatural self-mergence in Christ; maternal life to show us the secret whereby she brought forth in our very midst the Son of God.

Mary, then, protagonist of this great drama, may stand for us as the representative of the race in its mighty encounter with God, the incarnate genius of humanity: its perfect product, and its long-sought dream. She is Life indeed—our life—the very Mother of men. Nourished upon that

breast, held in safe contact with that homeliness, we may endure without fear our difficult re-birth into a strange universe. Under that mantle of mercy we may struggle up the spiral way on which she passed to her enthronement at the very centre of Reality. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb": for indeed the holy thing which is born of that surrendered spirit can be no other than Divine Humanity itself. Here we see as in a mirror the soul's august possibilities expressed.

So contemplating the image of Mary, so following as it were with dreamy love the unrolling of the pageant of her soul, bit by bit the necessary adventures of our own soul on its long quest of transcendence, become clear. We begin to discern the intimate construction of our life: the organic laws which must govern the unfolding of its flower. We begin to see that as the great drama of Reality is the music of God, so the growing spirit of

man is somewhat like a symphony; that it too has as its central fact a theme divinely developed, first stated in its simplicity, then manifested through a movement which is all strife and passion, bringing ever to richer and deeper expression by means of that toil and conflict the holy growing theme; finally, that it has a *reprise* in which the Divine theme transcends those stormy oppositions, and is lifted to higher levels of power, of beauty, and of peace. Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis; so runs the dialectic of the spirit. As with the mysteries of the Christian drama, so too with the experience of the individual soul. In joy, in sorrow, and in triumph the romantic melody of our inner life is expressed: the "ecclesiastical music" of our eager yet imperfect imitation of Christ.

Year by year the Christian Church, with life's peculiar instinct for the recapitulation of her own methods, plays out this symphony before us;

this heavenly story of our growth in God. From Advent to Assumption-tide it runs: "from glory to glory advancing" through the joyful mysteries of Christmas and Epiphany, and the sorrowful mysteries of the Passion, to the triumphant mystery of Resurrection, and of that transcendent and eternal life of the deified Spirit which is heralded by the Easter-fact. A threefold ascent, a spiral way, is then made clear before us, as the pathway from appearance to reality: once fully accomplished in history by our Master, and therefore demanded according to its measure from each awakened soul. The inspiring spirit of this ascent is to be no negative, aloof rejection of that given and apparent world. Rather from first to last, it is a steady uplifting of all things into the order of Divine Reality. The whole of man's nature—will, intellect, and love—is concerned in it: it keeps in warmest human fashion close hold upon the Here and Now. At once a

journey, yet a development; a stripping off, yet a completing; a victory, yet a self-loss; only in a paradox can its supernal nature be made clear.

A wholeness, at once Divine and human—the veritable expression of the Eternal in time—is the character of the new life to be aimed at; and at last perhaps to be achieved. It is only by the humble and difficult mystery of growth that attainment can be possible for us: that growth which runs through all creation, the universal and dynamic expression of the Mind of Christ. New life He asks from us; yes! not from us alone, but from every level of creation—new life in bird and tree and creeping thing, new life breaking from the Seed which He has planted in the soul. Here—not in any static creed, nor any dream-like mystic revelation—is the fulfilment of all meanings, the filling up of the measure of all glory, the disclosing of the final aim of our living and unresting universe.

Yet not alone shall we accomplish it, by the inherent energies of that germ of Divine life within. As the mystery of growth in the little human child seems somewhat upspringing from within, yet is actually dependent on nourishment given from without—on a friendly universe that upholds and feeds it—so it is with that little child of the Infinite, the soul. The will stretching to God, growing up towards Him as it seems by the vital quality of its love, and carrying with it the whole personality—this must be fed from without, nourished by the Divine Life incessantly poured in on us, if it is to develop, to survive.

> "As the small rain upon the tender grass,
> And as the showers upon the herb,"

so is the action of grace upon the growing soul. Grace, then, shall balance growth, and support it: grace, and that vital art of prayer, whereby we appropriate it, opening gates to its inflow, transmuting it into the very substance of our life.

We are not left desolate in this our great adventure. As our bodies in the world of nature, so are our souls immersed and upheld in the world of grace. As the growing tree in the earth, so are we rooted in God. As the flower to the sun, our spirits may open to Him, draw from His infinite strength the power that inspires our growth. "As the shower upon the herb," His Reality is mysteriously distilled upon us: the heavenly food which nourishes His whole creation and is at once the very Bread of Angels and the sustenance of littlest living things. When man first knows this, then he begins to know his wonder and his littleness: to discern the actuality of his sonship, the mystery and beauty of that Immanent Love which holds him safe within Its arms. "Hereby know we that we abide in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His spirit."

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES OF THE SOUL'S ASCENT

FIRST JOYFUL MYSTERY

THE ANNUNCIATION

Seen from this side the veil, the wonder of the Incarnation is the descent of Godhead to us : yet seen from the standpoint of Eternity, it may well be that the truer wonder is the ascent of our humanity to Him. In the eyes of the angels that boundless generosity is but the meet expression of His nature : *donner est chose naturel à Dieu.* It is rather in Mary's receptivity that these would find the miracle : in that unique example of a perfect response.

Life as they see it, that mounting flood of Spirit ever striving, tending, towards God, here touched Reality at last. So many had gone up the mountain to that one desired encounter ; only to be thwarted by the cloud

that broods upon the summit, and hides from human eyes the Shining Light within. The great prophets, poets, and philosophers of the antique world—all these had gone up, all had marked classic moments in the ascent of the race. Then came a little girl, pure, meek, and receptive: and ran easily to her destiny and the destiny of the Universe because she was "full of grace." She held out her heart to the Invisible, and in this act flung a bridge across the chasm which separates Illusion from Reality.

Mary becomes by this circumstance the type and pattern of each human soul. Consciously or unconsciously, all are candidates for her high office: all are striving towards the Transcendent, stretching towards the contact of the Divine. She alone, because of her lowliness, "failed not of the prick, the which is God." Sealed and made safe by His touch on her, she remained for all time immaculate —the veritable Sophia, the unspotted

virgin, yet the fruitful mother of the soul's true life.

> *"Quem cum amavero, casta sum,*
> *cum tetigero, munda sunt,*
> *cum accepero, virgo sum!"*

This is a part of the great paradox of purity, the shining chastity of love, whereby :

> ". . . Of pure Virgins none
> Is fairer seen
> Save One
> Than Mary Magdalene."

" Hail, Mary, full of grace," said the angel. To him that hath, shall be given. Because Mary was full of grace, to her was vouchsafed the crowning grace of the created order : the life of God upspringing within her, the deification of humanity.

O felix mens et beata anima, quæ te Dominum Deum suum meretur devote suscipere, et in tua susceptione spirituali gaudio repleri! O quam magnum suscipit Dominum, quam dilectum inducit hospitem, quam jucundum recipit socium, quam fidelem acceptat amicum,

quam speciosum et nobilem amplectitur sponsum: præ omnibus dilectis, et super omnia desiderabilia amandum!

How hard, we say, for the little human animal to rise to such a height! Yet perhaps it was not very difficult: for she did but carry up to a sublime and simple operation humanity's greatest and most natural activity—the act of prayer. She stretched to God: and where a way is open, He cannot but come in. "Thy opening and His entering are but one moment," said Eckhart, for Spirit waits eternally at the door of the flesh: "and to wait until thou openest is harder for Him than for thee." Only the opposition of our separated will hinders the perpetual incarnation of the Spirit of God: hence Mary's willing receptivity, her humble self-surrender, was the direct condition of the inflow of His Life—that "rippling tide of Divine love" which breaks in light and colour on the human shore, but has behind it the whole weight of the ocean of God-

head, pressing relentless to its bourne. "For the Spirit of God," says Boehme, "goeth with the willing into the soul, it desireth the soul; it setteth its magia towards the soul; the soul needs only to open the door."

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? It is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle."

Thus does the Announcing Angel cry at the closed door of the heart: and quick behind him, bearing him upon its current, comes the inpouring torrent of the Spiritual Life. "The Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle"—the all-conquering Love, as a rushing wind and as a purging flame, inhabitating the human creature, searching body, soul, and spirit to the deeps, turning purity to ardour, and making of the obedient Maiden the Mother of her Saviour and her God.

But Mary did not hear the splendid periods of that message. For her one phrase was enough. "The Lord is with thee": all was told in this. "Thou art full of grace; thy door is open. The Lord *is* with thee: God is thy possession here and now." When the awakened soul knows this indeed, no more needs to be announced to it. All hangs then on its response. And Mary said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." Will and grace, which "rise and fall together," here rose to their classic expression and had their perfect work. The soul, says St Bernard, is in essence "a capacity for the Infinite." In this her being, her very existence, consists. That capacity is no mere quality, it is *herself*: and on her acceptance of this, the governing fact of her nature, the whole of her cyclic history depends. "Be it unto me according to thy word." I am human, so a home for Thee.

How then shall it happen to us—this

act of self-realisation, this pure impulse of surrender, this first beginning of our new career? Where shall the news of our royal vocation reach us: at what point shall a messenger lean out to us from the sheltering world of spirit, to cry *Dominus tecum* in our astonished ears? We cannot know. In the dreams of the old painters, Gabriel did not always flash upon Mary as she knelt in prayer. Sometimes he found her as she sat musing in the twilight; sometimes as she went to draw water at the well. Sometimes he woke her from sleep in the early morning; or slid within her vision as she worked at her embroidery frame. So too with us. Grace laughs at our little barriers: our artificial separation of sacred from profane. Perhaps we shall hear his murmurous *Ave* in a silent hour of contemplation: perhaps it will come to us, clear and startling, from out the ecstasies of love. It may be in the exultant periods of music, or shining in the

eyes of the poor, the maimed, and the unworthy, that the angel of our Annunciation will come. It matters not. Whether that illumination come to us from the altar or from the teeming streets, out of a radiant sky, or from the midst of many sorrows—whether it find us at work or at play, at war with the world or at peace—"one thing only is necessary," the instant eagerness of our response.

Domine Deus meus, creator meus, et redemptor meus, cum tali affectu, reverentia, laude et honore, cum tali gratitudine, dignitate et amore, cum tali fide, spe et puritate, te affecto hodie suscipere, sicut te suscepit et desideravit sanctissima mater tua, gloriosa virgo Maria, quando Angelo evangelizanti sibi incarnationis mysterium, humiliter ac devote respondit: Ecce ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.

SECOND JOYFUL MYSTERY

THE VISITATION

"And Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste." Activity followed close upon the heels of revelation; as if the new dower of vitality poured in on her must somehow be expressed. She could not stay passively in those angel-haunted solitudes, where she had been overshadowed by the power and the presence of God. Not in stillness, in rapt meditation, was the Child Emmanuel to be quickened in her womb. The pendulum of spirit, that swings perpetually between fruition and self-donation—the mysterious give-and-take of the living soul—drove her out into life's arena, and up to the hill-tops of prayer: the double movement of the awakened heart.

Three times in the long story of man's transcendence, we are shown the soul driven up into the mountain by the growing spirit within: three times a prayerful ascent to life's summits is shown to be an implicit of the Way. In the mystery of the Visitation that soul goes joyfully and hastily. She seeks of her own volition the hill country: the new life within her stings to instant consciousness the spiritual passion for the heights. Here is the first instinct of the soul that is touched by God. "My beloved spake and said unto me: Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." There is but one answer to that heavenly invitation. It is the active, exultant prayer of the neophyte; that unlearned prayer of utmost simplicity and beauty which seems like childish footsteps running up and out towards its home. It is so full of gladness, charged with gratitude and trust, that the very labour of ascent becomes a joy: "for He that is mighty

hath magnified me, and holy is His name."

In another mood than this the adult and heroic Christian must bear the cross uphill towards his death in God: in another glory, power, and beauty ascend at last from the Mount of Vision to the ecstatic union with Reality. But the time for these things is not yet: a merciful cloud covers them. The soul at the beginning of her course dreams not of the sorrows and the triumphs that must attend upon her steady growth in prayer.

But there is another aspect of this outgoing of Mary from her home. She goes, not only to God, but to Man. Charity has been engendered in her, and already demands expression under two orders: in Service and in Adoration, the life of active love, the life of prayer. The quickening of that mysterious Divine life within sharpens her ears to the call of the human life without: already she is reminded that she cannot sever her experience from

that of the race. Humility, and its flower, which is Courtesy, spring up within her : the first unfolding fronds of the new growth. This is an earnest of the reality of her vocation ; the supernal nature of her destiny as bridge-builder between two worlds. So she goes up into the hill country in a spirit of prayer, yet goes upon a simple human errand, love Divine and human interwoven in her outlook from the first : and humanity, simple yet far-seeing, comes to meet her with a blessing on its lips. Filled with an exultant consciousness of new and crescent life she goes : possessed of a joy so lyrical in quality that it can only find expression in a song. " And Mary said : My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." It is the greatest poem of Christendom, yet from homeliest natural intercourse its ecstatic periods are born. The music of the Magnificat springs out of the very heart of life.

In that hour of the Divine Office which looks forward to the coming day as yet unborn, the coming life implicit but unseen, the striving, growing Church—at once type and mother of all Christians—takes upon her lips this exultant, passionate song. She speaks then, as it seems, for every soul that has learned her secret, that participates in her mystical life: for the hungry filled, for the lowly so wondrously exalted, for each humble human creature who has felt the vivifying touch of love Divine. Yet we ask ourselves as we listen to those rapturous declarations, whether mere humanity, however pure, meek, and Godward-tending, were capable of such a song as this? Rather it seems as though the Magnificat were the first earnest of the Incarnation: truth apprehended under the veils of poetry before it could be recognised in the garment of flesh. Here Christ, finest flower of the Divine Immanence, sings and prays by our side; even whilst He

grows within our hearts. It was not with such high poetry, so magical a touch upon reality, that Mary could have replied to Gabriel's message. A world of experience lies between the meek surrender of *Ecce ancilla Domini* and the exaltation of *Magnificat anima mea*. Now, she and her God inextricably entwined together in the common life He shall redeem, she knows that it is with her as His word proclaimed: and can afford to exult because all generations shall call her the blessed, the supremely happy, the Pioneer of the race on its steady growth towards its home.

"And His mercy is on them that fear Him, throughout all generations": —yea! on all those, my daughters in the spirit, who have shared their Mother's experience: all those who, taught by me, have opened their hearts to the inflowing Spirit of God. All these shall rise up and call me blessed, for I am the Church, their nursing Mother, I am Life, running to

meet her Maker and her Love. I am Wisdom, Mother of all fair things. See my descendants, carrying my secret life through the centuries: Gertrude and Julian, Catherine and Teresa, those handmaidens of Perfect Love, whose low estate He has regarded indeed. See them grow with my growth, and share my sorrows and my triumphs. A Rod sprang from Jesse. Out of the virginal heart of Mary springs the very Tree of Life. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God with us."

Of growth, then, this mystery speaks to us: the hidden, secret, yet unhindered growth of the buried seed. The soul has accepted its destiny: now "according to His Word" the irresistible process of its life goes on. In this living, growing world, this place of passionate efflorescence, where the great trees stand like spreading flames, and every humble plant,

each furred and finned and feathered thing, has by its gift of growth a part in the great process of God—here of a sudden, Spirit, which is to say Life in its sublimest aspect, has started into being within the web of visible creation. A seed has germinated that shall indeed "grow up, and become greater than all herbs and shoot out great branches": branches that shall reach to highest heaven, and bridge the gap that separates two worlds.

"Fiorito è Cristo nella carne pura,
or se ralegri l'umana natura.

Natura umana, quanto eri scurata,
ch' al secco fieno tu eri arsimigliata!
Ma lo tuo sposo t' ha renovellata,
or non sie ingrata
de tale amadore,

Tal amador è fior de puritade,
nato nel campo de verginitade,
egli è lo giglio de l'umanitade,
de suavitate
e de perfetto odore."

THIRD JOYFUL MYSTERY

THE NATIVITY

"The days were fulfilled that she should be delivered": not by any sudden miracle, by any cataclysmic break with nature, but according to the steady and unhurried processes of Life. All specialisation of the Divine is here discounted: and the world's supreme revelation, linking itself with the world's diurnal cares and sweetest natural outbirths, "fulfils the days" and comes forth into the World of Appearance gently, naturally; conforming to the law of living things. That revelation comes, it is true, from the Transcendent; it is a spark from off the altar of the Universe, a veritable scintilla of the Life of God. Yet it buries itself in the world of things, willingly immanent in the human, in

so far as that human dwells within the circle of its power.

"He is not the God of philosophers and scholars," said Pascal. No: but "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"—of simple natural life, of flocks and herds, of seeking, dreaming, wrestling, restless man. *Hoc vobis signum*: the young girl, the little baby, the carpenter, the stable, and the patient beasts. The news told rather in sheepfold than in sanctuary; the Glory of the Lord, the mystic Shekinah, withdrawn from the Holy of Holies to shine upon the fields—here are the signs that God indeed is with us, these are the chosen *media* which declare His will to men. *O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, jacentem in præsepio.*

Spiritual intuition has always preserved clear consciousness of all that waits upon this Birth: the sudden passionate exultation of the angelic world, all its charitable desires at last

fulfilled, all the sacramental manifestation of created things, leading, pointing, to the Crib. Heaven and earth embracing one another: the very being of humanity, its manhood, crowned by this incarnation, and snatched up to a correspondence with the Real. Solemnly announced and long prepared, yet when the hour strikes, when that new life, veritably our own, is seen before us, and "Man stands in the New Birth": then all that had gone before is obliterated, all gives place to this, to "the wonder of wonders, the human made Divine."

The long, strange months of our expectation are over: that hidden certain trust of ours, that joyous consciousness of crescent spirit "our own yet not our own," is justified at last. It is justified in the actual outbirth and appearance of that most real and mystic Life; which is so profound just because it is so simple, so far above us just because it is so divinely near.

"Welcome all wonders in one sight,
Eternity shut in a span,
Summer in winter, day in night,
Heaven in earth, and God in man,
Great little one, whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth."

Hodie Christus natus est! hodie salvator apparuit. Suddenly our eyes are unsealed, and we perceive the Eternal Christ living in and for and with us; heaven waiting here and now upon our vision of it; the coming of the Kingdom that is within. We know once for all that the angels need not to come, since they are ever present—"Turn but a stone, and start a wing!" This we know, because the Son of God at last is brought to birth in us. Bethlehem is to us the gateway of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In this hour we feel and know the stirring as it were of a new Life; veritably our own, yet not of us, intimate and dear, yet august and incomprehensible. We experience all the effort and struggle of birth, its uncertainties and fears: bringing

forth, as it seems from the womb of personality, that "Starry Stranger" whose advent shall give meaning to our life. Is it we who are changed by that which is worked in us? We cannot tell: but another epoch is now begun for us, another creature—childish and weak, yet like-minded to Christ—looks through our eyes upon a transfigured world. That world is now seen by us "apparelled in celestial light," saturated with Divine possibilities; hampered by matter, yet agleam with God. Of this world we know ourselves, reborn, to be the microcosm. That new life of ours, that thing we have brought forth: this, too, is full of infinite possibilities, a thing of potential freedom linked to somewhat that is not free. We know that He is indeed the Son of the Highest and playmate of the angels. Yet His nurture is confided to our care. It is of the essence of this Divine revelation, working in and through the processes of life, that it

comes to us not ready-made, not finished and completed, but surrounded by the halo of a helplessness which calls for our self-giving love. All now seems left to our maternal offices. Shelter we must give, and nourishment. God has sprung up for us, out of the earth as it seems, from the very heart of humanity. Life of our lives, He takes our growing life upon Him: all He gives, and all demands. "He hath not abhorred the Virgin's womb" nor disdained to make the very stuff of our manhood a link in the process of His Immemorial Plan. He will climb by our sides up the great ladder of Becoming. He will grow with our growth toward that supernal life which all shall have in Him. So great is the confidence of our God in those that seek Him, that He has placed within our hands the awful power of marring the image of Divinity.

"Le plus infirme des pécheurs peut découronner,
peut couronner
Une espérance de Dieu."

As the mother's life is merged in her child, finds in that child its meaning, and through that child's adventure gleans its most searching and exalted experiences of joy and grief: so now the focus of the soul's history shifts from Mary to Jesus—from the natural life entinctured by overshadowing spirit, to the veritable Spirit-Life new born. The growing Christ is now to be the centre of our story; to exhibit the forward thrust of life, to bear its yoke. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder."

When we know this, when this gift and this vocation are clear to us, we think that we are at the beginning of glory; since "Heaven itself lies here below," and nothing can dim its joy. Yet perhaps it may be that we are rather at the beginning of woes. The strange new thing in our arms, the little Child of the Infinite mysteriously born of us, has secret affinity with that inexorable Life which came to

bring, not peace, but a piercing sword. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill." This, we say, is the heavenly comment on that Birth. Peace? Yes, to men of goodwill, men of selfless and surrendered desire, whose hearts are at one with the Transcendent, and accept all that is ministered to them at the hand of generous life. But the Church, when she took upon her lips that spiritual song, made thereto significant additions, that she might fit it to her daily needs. That which she begins in exaltation she continues in humility, in a declaration of our meek dependence on Immanent Grace. And suddenly she cries out to that perfect symbol of surrender, to that Lamb of God whose self-donation alone can take the taint of imperfection from the world. Now, even at this moment, when we seem to have all that we dare ask and more, our helplessness and need of Him is clear to us—"Thou that takest

away the sin of the world, receive our prayer ! "

" For Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord." Already the soul's Friend and Companion has gone before it to the altar—the only path to union with the Father that is possible to the unruly human heart.

FOURTH JOYFUL MYSTERY

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

"And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord."

Changeful, unresting life, inexorable in its progress, its onward push, drove them out into the busy world. Humility, the crown of royal love, drove them to a courteous acquiescence in the rites and forms ordained of other men.

Here, then, in this mystery, the secret adventure of the spirit so deeply hidden "with Christ in God" suddenly emerges as it were into the open: takes its place in the great flux of the universal Becoming, com-

mits itself to the seething tides of human life. There comes a moment when the wonderful thing we have borne, the Life we have cherished, can no longer be concealed. Whether we will or no, the push of Divine Love, which operates its growth in us, sends us out with it into the world; and we must go up, as Mary, to the temple that is in Jerusalem, must bring the new life we have borne into contact with the diurnal actuality of things.

How secret till this hour has been the soul's experience: held within the homely circle of consciousness, defended by the banners of love from the enquiring gaze of other men! Now that soul must go out to those other men, meet their curious or indifferent gaze with courage: it is the first intimation of those heroic and self-giving activities to which the new life is dedicated in advance. "Every ascent to God implies a descent in charity to man." We cannot lie for ever

sequestered from the tyrannous ceremony, the tiresome, orderly processes of life. We are bound to accomplish the "liturgy of love," offering our sacrifice "according to that which is said in the law of the Lord." The royal instinct of donation must be fostered from the first, even by the hard and difficult exposure of our treasure to the apathetic gaze of the world: the giving up of our little winged and dove-like thoughts, their wild and delicate magic, to the prosaic demands of a formal creed.

It is not a small sacrifice that is here exacted, in this first emergence from the nest where the soul had its secret to itself. So dear to it have been the solemn fields and the rough stable: the hiddenness and silence, the friendly neighbourhood of simple natural things. But the days are accomplished, and a road goes out of Bethlehem towards Jerusalem; towards the great centre of national, social, credal life. That organised

and busy life does not seem to want us: it is well satisfied with the fruits of civilisation, has delimited the mutually exclusive spheres of "flesh" and "spirit," built and fenced in its temple, established its discreetly ceremonial cult of a far-away Divinity, decided on its attitude to God. Of us it makes only one demand: that we shall acquiesce in its ritual, become one of the obedient crowd. We must tame our wild joyousness, put our romantic passion into blinkers: conform, in fact, to the ecclesiastical ideal. Thus, we learn in amazement, was the "Light that lightens the Gentiles" first made known to men; by this humble submission of Life to the demands of tradition, this interweaving of liberty with authority, of the present with the past. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart—surrender is My secret first and last"; and here already at the opening of its course the soul begins to learn it,

submitting the liberty it has in Christ to the formulæ which seek to mediate Him to men.

True, there is here no real dimming of the inward joy, for our Love goes with us : yet there is a certain declination from that exultant state of rapture, that lyrical delight in which we have borne and nurtured It, as the curve of the spiral road takes us down towards the world. The little Child of the Infinite seems to us ill at ease amongst the formal splendours of the Temple. " Love's architecture is His own " ; but these man-made walls, so oppressively sure of their " consecrated office," stand about Him as a prison, rather than as a home : shut Him from His sunlit palace of the day. In these stately aisles a shyness falls between us : we no longer speak together as we did. Certainly, we think, the road is trending downwards : the heavenly consciousness, though still we hold it tightly, changes, and threatens to grow dim. Yet, what

though we lose that intimate and exquisite communion? This is but the accident, not the substance, of our veritable life in God. "All visions, revelations, and heavenly feelings," says St John of the Cross, "and whatever is greater than these, are not worth the least act of humility, bearing the fruits of that charity which neither values nor seeks itself, which thinketh well not of self but of others."

In the spirit of humility then, bearing in its arms the Fruit of that charity which neither values nor seeks itself, the soul is to go to the world which awaits it: "thinking well" of its laws and its customs, gladly conforming to its least demands. And here, for once, the world repays its generosity. Coming to it with its Treasure, it is met with the acclamation of the seekers and the seers. "He hath exalted the humble and meek": once again, as at the Visitation, simple courtesy is given its reward. The eyes of the race are quick to discern our secret:

in the vivid, piercing vision of its dreamers, the eager glance of those who wait and hunger for a glory that shall be revealed. They recognise the strangeness we bear with us, conceal it though we may. "My Secret to myself": it is the very watchword of the mystic. But Simeon, that steadfast, patient watcher on the threshold of revelation, breaks through the soul's defences and divines the wonder of the Thing upon its breast; and cries to his God and ours in an ecstacy of selfless gratitude, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!"

Thus from first to last our solidarity with the race is to be impressed on us. With each new phase of growth, with the declaration of each fresh mystery, the call of humanity rings afresh in our ears. Elizabeth in the hill-top town; the glad shepherds running to the stable; wild nature and sweet homeliness demanding of the soul their share in its wonder and its joy. Self-mergence in the tradi-

tions of the multitude, free and generous self-revelation — however much we hate it—to the eyes of those who truly seek : here is to be our duty and our delight. By self-giving we grow, by glad spending we grow rich in Him, by burning, our Light grows brighter—" a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."

FIFTH JOYFUL MYSTERY

THE CHILD AMONGST THE DOCTORS

The three offices of the angels, said Dionysius the Areopagite—the three properties of that spiritual energy, that prevenient grace which hems us in—were to purify, to illuminate, to perfect, those souls which they cherished and controlled. To each of these great businesses one stage of the Mystic Way was given; Purgative, Illuminative, Unitive. These mark the soul's growth, its steady transmutation, under the pressure of grace, the action of angelic love. The joyful mysteries of spiritual childhood are the mysteries of purification; of the emergence of the real, its subordination of the unreal and the imperfect in us—the birth and establishment of the pure spirit of our

Master, the Lordship of Love. Now, that stage draws to an end. We begin to look forward to the path of Illumination; the way, we think, of knowledge and clear sight. We are growing, stretching out in all directions. Will, intellect, and love are waxing strong; and suddenly we see, as a dazzling vision, wisdom and understanding awaiting us, enticing with their promise, ready as we think to snatch us from the dim, uncertain world of intuition, and satisfy our new and arrogant demand that we may *know*. We hear the voice of Wisdom in the streets, crying—

> "Come! eat ye of my bread,
> And drink ye of the cup that I have mingled,"

and know that she invites us to a heavenly table; though we little guess the place where that Banquet shall be set, or the bitterness of that Cup of Blessing in which she shall communicate to us of the Life of God. So we loose the hand of Life our Mother, and run to find knowledge amongst

the doctors—knowledge of God and man: having yet to learn that the only Way of Illumination for immortal yet imprisoned spirit is the way of pain and growth and love.

It is a childish ignorance: yet even in the progress of our Master and Forerunner we see one incident which confirms this instinct of the growing soul, to seek in mere knowledge some clue to the mystery of life. In His proving of all things He went before us, even on this false scent of the questing spirit; *non necessitate, sed caritate trahente.* Being made man even as we are, He did not disdain man's method of discovery through mistake. But this adventure does not belong to the immense activities of His Manhood: it is rather the one type-act of spiritual immaturity, set for us as a symbol of "the years of childish things." It is a part, too, of the education of the Heavenly Child within us, a schooling in humility, a healthful throw-back to the funda-

mental realities ; a hint to us that our best-intentioned wilful choices are of little account in the great purposes of God. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child." The child Christ fancied that He was about His Father's business, when He disputed with the theologians in the temple porch ; and tried, by the exploration of their traditional wisdom, to discover the secret of that mysterious Life which He felt already, but did not understand. He left the actualities of human experience for the abstractions and the subtleties of the intellectual world. At once He was "lost" in respect of humanity : the virgin soul that had borne the Divine Seed and cherished it, now sought for its traces in vain.

Thus the crescent spirit of the new man early begins to seek the path on which it must travel : coming to the end of the first stage of its journey, it looks eagerly for the next turn on the way. In something *known*, some

secret wisdom imparted—a revelation given perhaps to the insistent neophyte, but guarded from the crowd by those who keep its shrine, an inward mysterious meaning evoked from a moribund tradition—here, many imagine that they see their first chance of transcendence: forgetting that the one essential secret is revealed not to intelligent scholars, but to growing babes. They dream of an initiation, some magical "Open Sesame" of the spiritual world; a ready-made solution that shall relieve them from the dreadful obligation of growing into truth. This solution, they think, once they have found it, will lift the cloud from off the mountain, rend the sanctuary veil. They know not that this veil shall only be parted when the soul dies upon the cross, "resisting interior temptation even to despair." So they run eagerly along the way of knowledge: only to find a blind alley, where they looked in their childish optimism for the

mighty thoroughfare that leads to God. Then Maternal Life must seek them sorrowing. Having found them, she takes them by the hand and leads them home; there to grow strong in the spirit, subject to Nature's firm yet gentle ruling, "Safe amongst shadowy, unreal human things."

One and all, we go up to the Temple of Knowledge in the natural enthusiasm and trust of youth. We see it in all its splendour. We hear of the Holy of Holies about which it is built. There, we think, is clearly our destination. There, could we but demand it by the one sufficing question, is the secret which we desire. We believe in the saving power of intellect; and fancy that the encounter of Edipus with the Mistress of the Woven Song is but another version of the soul's supreme encounter with its God. Poor, bewildered, clever children, we sit amongst the doctors; believing ourselves ever to be upon the eve of a revelation which does not come. "All

who hear us are astonished "—hear our eager, wistful questions, charged with passion, coming out of the very heart of life to shatter themselves against the impregnable fortifications of the academic mind. Yet the Reality which we seek has but one message for us. "I am the Food of the full-grown: *grow*, that you may feed on Me." Wisdom's table veritably awaits us, but the way thereto is by another road than this. Clinging to the skirts of life, we must follow where she leads us: through

> "Shadowy-peopled Infancy,
> Through Death and Birth to a diviner day."

Not by dint of any second-hand knowledge administered to us, any learned "raunsaking of the Divine Majestie," but by humble submission to the slow and steady processes of growth, shall we at last attain

> "Realms where the air we breathe is love,
> Which in the winds on the waves doth move,
> Harmonising this earth with what we feel above."

To an ascent towards Jerusalem, which the mystics called the City of Contemplation, our new birth, our secret life, we think, was aimed. There, it is true, is our final destination: yet the goal of our journey is not the hill of Zion, with its temple and its ceremonial altar, but another place of sacrifice, the hill of Calvary, the harsh and lonely altar of the Cross. To this we shall come when the hour strikes for us: seeking, not knowledge, but place of utmost self-surrender, in majesty and lowliness making the soul's imperial progress to the grave. When we come at last to that mysterious region, the clever intellect must stay without. But love and desire will enter in: the soul's impassioned desire to give all for God. "If thou wouldst know then what this desire is," says Hilton, "verily it is Jesus, for He worketh this desire in thee, and giveth it thee; and He it is that desireth in thee, and He it is that is desired; He is all, and He doth

all, if thou couldst see Him. Behold Him well, for He goeth before thee, not in bodily shape, but insensibly, by secret presence of His power. Therefore see Him spiritually if thou canst, and fasten all thy thoughts and affections to Him, and follow Him wheresoever He goeth ; for He will lead thee the right way to Jerusalem, that is, to the sight of peace and contemplation."

We are but at the beginning of this our true and only pilgrimage : but our Master and our Love is with us, to show us the " right way." To " follow Him wheresoever He goeth " is the only knowledge that we need. He leads us now to Nazareth ; to simple, homely life. Not the head but the heart is the spirit's growing-point. Divine Humanity will not attain to manhood's stature, power, and courage by anything taught, told, or shown ; but by difficult choices made and work honestly done. The carpenter's bench is a better instrument of transcendence than the seat amongst the doctors in

the temple porch: that "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love," whom we must follow, was not a product of the schools. He went home and *grew*: humbly learning to do hard and solid work. "All kinds of skill," says Tauler, "are gifts of the Holy Ghost": and they may bring forth the fruits of that Spirit in those who seek to acquire them in full submission of will and gladness of heart. Christ comes with us to the workshop. With our hands we may learn of Him the fashioning of the Cross: and in learning may learn too those great lessons of patience and endurance, of industrious and courageous love, which will strengthen our muscles to bear its burden in the end.

On this note of acquiescence, of surrender to the steady process of diurnal life, the acceptance of a deeply human education, the joyful mysteries of the soul come to an end. As rain and frost and wind can make the mountain a more lovely thing than any earthly artist's pictured dream;

so it is from the friction of daily life that the summits of the soul shall emerge in their triumphant loveliness. Not some esoteric and deliberate art of sculpture, taught to the adepts of an ancient wisdom but hidden from the great desirous crowd ; rather, the steady action of the simplest natural forces—summer and winter, storm and sunlight, dew and drought—shall carve their gross contours according to the mind of the Artist, fret out their lofty pinnacles with its faery magic ; and give them, when the times are accomplished, the unearthly beauty of the spiritual heights.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE SOUL'S ASCENT

FIRST SORROWFUL MYSTERY

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

The ending of the joyful mysteries is the ending of the childhood of the soul. From the sweet and honest industries of Nazareth, it is flung into the furnace of manhood. The angel that once announced to us new life, now cries in our ears a sterner message: *Viriliter agite*—be a man—if indeed you would be the hidden child of God. With short interval for placid service, for any of those agreeable activities which our comfortable self-indulgence calls "life," the secret passionate and dolorous mysteries of Divine humanity begin.

In our childhood we asked for knowledge, little knowing what we sought. Now knowledge is indeed to come to us; knowledge by union,

direct and poignant, by participation in the passion of our Incarnate God. The soul who has experienced the joys of the first dawning, the birth and the nurture, of her hidden life, finds that the next stage of her progress shall be an actual sharing in the redemptive pains of Christ. How, indeed, should it be otherwise? What other solution could our love endure? *Si nihil contrarium vis pati, quomodo eris amicus Christi?* It is a forced option; to suffer either the loss of His friendship or the burden of His griefs. We cannot hesitate in this decision. No second choice competes with this great honour of following in His footsteps if we can. All else—all success or joy or service—is but a shadow-show: a children's game.

"When I became a man," says Paul, "I put away childish things." The intellectual subtleties, the "religious ideas" pondered and played with at the feet of Gamaliel, crumbled to dust at the sight of Stephen's joy and agony.

Then " God was pleased to reveal His Son in me," the light " shone out of darkness," the latent spark flamed up. Then Paul, made ardent by the fire of love, suddenly initiated into the mystery of life, went out into that world to which he was crucified ; from glory to glory advancing, yet so as by suffering shame and death. " Troubled on every side," he went, " yet not distressed ; perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

As the Church in her year-long drama turns from the Crib to begin at once her journey to the Cross, and puts on the royal purple of penance as Epiphany draws to a close : so it is in the intimate drama of that growing and ascending soul in whom " the life of Jesus shall be made manifest." The slow growing up of the Divine

within it, the radiant pressure of an Immanent Love transforming the workshop and the home, comes to its term. "Thou hast been too long a child at the breast, a spoiled child," said the Eternal Wisdom to Suso. Spoiled indeed, and lapped too deep in comfort, if we cannot hear in the inexorable voice that calls us from the nursery, the very accents of industrious and courageous love.

It is out in the open, away from all protection, in a moment of effort, of deliberate choice, that the mysterious transfusion of man's spirit by the more living spirit of Christ—His transcendent Manhood entincturing it—is first to be felt and recognised. "Our wills are ours to make them Thine": this is the meaning of man's liberty, the secret spring of the process which takes him back to God. "Be it unto me according to Thy word," said the soul at her amazing initiation into the new life; "Not my will, but Thine, be done," says the Godward-tending spirit

that was born of her, at the moment in which a new stage of life's ascent must be attacked. The sanctified will, the attention orientated to the great interests of Reality, never to the fears and anguish of the Self ; this primal necessity of all transcendence is brought home to us at each crisis in the history of the soul.

These crises, these sudden and terrible declarations of our freedom, and of the price that freedom exacts—the making of a voluntary choice—always come upon the spirit in an hour in which it is turned towards Reality : in an hour, that is to say, of actual, if not of conscious prayer. Mary's surrender to Life's inflow ; the temptation of Jesus, His crucial choice between power and humble love ; now the agony in this garden of olives. Here the soul has come, perhaps, to seek its opportunity of utmost joy and of profound communion in the whispering darkness, that dim " place where lovers lose themselves " ; with-

drawing a space from all others, the better to talk with Him alone. It looks for its Love, awaits the glimmering light, the touch, the heavenly silence: and suddenly it is face to face with the unseen Event towards which it has been growing—the Choice, the dreadful prerogative of the free. Not the primary choice of the temptation in the wilderness, between ambition and service, between power and love; but the final choice, as it seems, between life and death, success and failure, when the Cup of Tribulation is offered by the gentle yet unfaltering Hand of God.

That first great choice of adult spirit was made in the solitudes, amongst wide spaces and austere. Then, by a merciful dispensation, all the complexities of life and growth were cleared away; and the three mighty possibilities of all-powerful yet ill-directed will, were set against the arid background of things. It was the choice between the Divine slavery

of the consecrated heart and the human liberty of self-sufficient mind: between the Suffering Servant of the old prophet and the Superman of the new.

But the second, deeper choice that comes on us now—the choice between life and death, success and failure—comes out of the very heart of growing, fertile life. Not as servants but as sons we make it: for the days of our bondage are over, and Christ has made us free. It comes at the end of those joyful mysteries which have assured us of our powers. Much was then given us: now much shall be asked of us again. It shall be made in the midst of a garden, among delicate and lovely living things; radiant now to our exalted consciousness with a transcendent beauty "of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower" and shining on us through the night which veils our anguish from the world. It shall be made lying prostrate on the kindly turf, pushing

out from the soil all about us. Close to our clenched hands the little hidden flowers, those royal things that need not toil or spin, cease not in their quiet maternal tasks. All about us stand the trees, our silent comrades ; vibrant with the upward-pulsing sap, budding in every twig with a life that shall carry on the mystery of creation when we have gone down into the terrible and destined grave. At such an hour the flaming course of spirit seems poor beside the steady march of life.

Yet because here *is* natural life, undeflected by our petty wilfulness, by the twisting, crooked action of our thought, these things among which we suffer seem to help us. The self-giving that we strive for is natural too ; it is the very crown of life, the goal of created things. All life, then, is with us as we try to turn to God : for the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of His sons. These our companions have their being in Him : their delicate

magic falls as clearly within the circle of His will as the difficult growth to which our tortured spirits must conform. So the murmurous voices of the night speak to us of a certain consolation; and our Mother Earth is with us, as she was with our Forerunner, in our prayer. "How beautiful are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" How beautiful the starry tent enverdured with wild olive, where we meet Thy angel in the night!

"Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent;
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him;
The little grey leaves were kind to Him.
The thorn tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content;
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When death and shame would woo Him last
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a Tree they slew Him last
When out of the woods He came."

What, then, is the true nature of this trial that initiates us into the sublime mysteries of sorrow? It is not hardship that we fear, the laborious life of service; for love is always industrious, though it be not always brave. But frustration, failure, death —*this* is the Cup offered to us: the horrible verdict of futility, uttered as it seems in the deeps of our spirits, the mocking response of an inimical universe to our tentative declarations of new life. To lead other men to the high pastures of holiness and peace, to continue in that ministry of healing confided to the illuminated soul: or else, to go down alone to the encounter of utmost humiliation, surrendering, as it seems, all hope of helping those who depended on us, that so as by fire we may save them in the end—this is the alternative of Gethsemane, and so bitter it is that even our divine Companion can only cry, "Father, let *this* Cup pass!"

It is an alternative that none are

strong enough to encounter, unless defended by the heavenly armour of utmost acquiescence in the will of God. The Christ within here cries to Christ without for succour. The soul turns in horror from this destiny of frustration ; seeing before it so many possibilities of happy service, feeling and knowing its power to help and heal. But human efficiency, well loved of the short-sighted creature, is not here the Creator's promise to His sons. There is indeed no " promise," no " covenant " ; only a demand upon our trust and courage. A self-donation that seems useless is asked of us : a self-donation not inspired by any foresight of the bliss that tribulation may win for us, any commercial scheme of salvation bought at a price, but by an utterly surrendered love, a naughting of the separated will. " Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done " ; annihilation itself, so it please Thee.

Yet there is for the Christian soul

an ecstasy even in this torment. *Quando ad hoc veneris, quod tribulatio tibi dulcis est, et sapit pro Christo; tunc bene tecum esse æstima, quia invenisti paradisum in terra.* All the Spirits of God are about it; leaning out from that Paradise of theirs, dark to it now, yet in which that soul also has its place. The joyful song of the exultant angels rejoicing in the upward march of life, supports it in its agony: penetrating grief and calming fear. And here once more in the darkness of the garden, just because of this renewed receptiveness, this acceptance of the chalice of pain, grace is veritably poured in on it, as in the first feeble hours of its new life. No more "as small rain upon the tender grass" it comes, but as the hard and drenching showers which hurt to heal—an extra dower of vitality, given at the beginning of sorrows; lest, deprived of that heavenly viaticum, man should faint and fall by the way.

" Soul of the acorn buried in the sod,
Lord of high trees and sunset-haunted hills,
Planter of primroses and very God
Of the bright daffodils,
Pity the weakness of the growing grain,
And drench our fields with rain ! "

SECOND SORROWFUL MYSTERY

THE SCOURGING

Fiat voluntas tua. The soul has made its choice: the terrible choice between its personal well-being and subservience to the inscrutable necessities of God. "Not my will, but Thine": my will shall be transmuted into love, "as iron thrust in the fire takes on the semblance of the flame," that so it may be utterly remade in Thee. Wonderful though my separate life has seemed, enlightened by God, and full of opportunities for service, I give it back to Thee now; merge it in the movement of the All. This was the choice made in Gethsemane. Now, that choice is to be carried into action, to find expression in the concrete world of things.

If we have indeed dared to accept the Chalice of Life—of intensest life—which was there offered to us, we have accepted it with all its implications. How then is this choice to be actualised, how exhibited in the growing soul's experience? How can we show our will's surrender; and what gift shall we bring to prove the quality of our love?

Our surrender shall be exhibited by a total self-abandonment, a willing meek acceptance of the lowest place in that School of Perfect Resignation of which the mystics tell us: an acceptance of the commonplace and ignominious suffering which is so easily meted out to us by an inimical or an indifferent world. Our gift of love shall be our whole selves offered up to Him: body, soul, and spirit on the altar, where He has been before. We must go out from the quiet garden of prayer: from that place of dim fragrance where the lover can speak directly to the heart of Beloved. As

the exultant hour of the Annunciation is followed on the spiral by a return to the homely courtesies of life, so the sacred moment of heroic choice in which the sorrowful way opens before us, is followed closely by the hardest of all mortifications; a throw-back, not to sublime and spiritual suffering, but to the coarse and common pains of earth. Here it is that the true worth of our surrender shall indeed be tested. Here we have the opportunity to prove our love. We are to make an oblation of our very bodies' dignity and reticence: ceding to Him the strong outposts of the citadel of pride. We are to make an oblation of all separateness and selfhood, whether manifested by body, soul, or spirit, to that stern "Acceptor of Sacrifices" who is yet our Father and our Friend.

Should not the growing soul be grateful for these purifying torments here offered to it—for the Scourge, the Thorns, and the Cross? Is it not a part of the unmeasured Divine gener-

osity, that these, the instruments of His Eternal Passion, are freely given to those littlest ones who follow in the way? So much has been given to us; so great a confidence reposed in us, and yet we have fallen so bitterly short of the fullness of the stature of Christ. Surely we are willing to pay for this by a contrition expressed in true penance?—to take our share in "the unimaginable disappointment of God"? Surely needful was this opportunity of pain. Threefold are the roots of imperfection within us. Threefold too must be the purifications wrought in us by these mysteries of sorrow; and here, we stand at the threshold of the first.

The secret ordeal of Gethsemane was but the annunciation of the trials of the adventuring spirit. The life which it elected in that hour of solemn choice is not to be made easy, for it is not, as the Quietists thought, "One Act." Its manhood must be tested in the open, by the mockery, the

insults, the unmeaning cruelties of the self-satisfied and imperceptive crowd. With none of the high circumstances of the martyrs—rather as one who has been a nuisance to his kind—the soul goes now to the pillar of utmost self-abasement. There, bound and helpless, exposed in its nakedness to the sharp lashes of earthly opinion, the victim of any who may turn against it—there shall the Christian who lays claim to the mystical fellowship of Jesus first exhibit his generosity, his constancy, his courage: there, down there in the turmoil, the squalor, the hubbub of daily life, where only the man of action is a hero, and the God-intoxicated seer at best a fool.

The whips of the world have always fallen sharply about the limbs of the world's saviours: and each finite soul in whom Christ is brought to birth—who feels the entincturing madness of His heavenly love—participates according to its measure in that great business of salvation; has a part in His

redemptive office, helps to fill up the measure of the fullness of God.

We too—though the secret flame within us burns feebly—yet bring to these brothers of ours all that we can tell of the good news of the Kingdom of Reality, the mystery of more abundant life ; and most often they meet our exultant tidings with the scourge of their indifference and contempt. We announce to them their royal lineage, and they put upon our head the thorny crown of an insulting tolerance. The helping hands, the willing pilgrim feet are often pierced by them, the self-giving heart is wounded by their scorn. The pains of Christ are felt thus in all His members. They are a veritable part of the pageant of His glory, and only by suffering can we prove our real participation in this His life. A voice comes to us out of the darkness, as we tread the way we think so hard and steep : " O all ye that pass by, behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." What is your little

grief and disappointment beside the sorrow wherewith I am filled? I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness I have sought you, bringing to your souls the tincture of Eternal Life. I have shown you that life in action, its actual growth towards God. I have not kept my secret to myself. That which I do, I do it in the name of all the race; freely I have received, freely I give. But you have made loneliness my portion; you have cut me off from amongst the sons of men. The bridge that I have built that you might walk thereon, you have deliberately broken down. I would have fed you with My Substance, and you have cast the Bread of Life away. *Ego te pavi manna per desertum; et tu me cecidisti alapis et flagellis.*

It is the voice of the Lord and Lover of men, heard behind the ceaseless noises of the earth-life, sorrowing as He passes amongst us unrecognised and alone. Shall we refuse to follow where He treads? Shall not we too

bear on our bodies His livery ; receiving for the mystic food we offer the buffet and the scourge ? Shall we not elect to stand beside Him, bound to the immovable pillar of the world's prejudice, patient under the pitiless lash of its curiosity, its astonishment, its contempt ? Here is our great opportunity of love, great chance of generosity : of an actual sharing in the life of God.

" A man once thought," says Tauler, " that God drew some men even by pleasant paths, while others were drawn by the paths of pain. Our Lord answered him thus, ' What think ye can be pleasanter or nobler than to be made most like unto Me ? that is by suffering. Mark, to whom was ever offered such a painful and troubled life as to Me ? And in whom can I better work, in accordance with My true nobility, than in those who are most like Me ? They are the men who suffer. No man ever suffered so bitterly as I ; and yet no man was ever so pure as I. When was I more

mocked than when I was most glorifying My Heavenly Father? Learn that My Divine Nature never worked so nobly in human nature as by suffering; and because suffering is so efficacious, it is sent out of great love.' "

Yet a mighty exultation, a joy untasted by those who only know the smooth side of the world, waits on the willing sufferer with and for Christ. In the hour of the body's captivity and hardest humiliation, the spirit first knows itself to be free. It lies easily in the hand of God; deliberately it waits upon His Will. With a deep serenity which the condemnation of the world will never trouble—more, with a strange inward joy, a flaming rapture, which the intelligence of the world will never understand—it submits its members to the scourge.

"Who shall separate us," cries Paul, "from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? Nay! in all these things we

are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us ! "

More than conquerors: bound to the pillar, enduring the lash of those who believe that they hold us in their power, " nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." So deeply immersed is the soul in the spiritual universe, so greatly has this harsh call on all its latent manliness increased its stature in that world, that here at the beginning of sorrows it sees itself at the beginning of victories. Its Triumphs are already at hand.

But these mighty declarations bring shame and silence to our little, flickering, self-regarding love, shrinking in terror from collision with the apathy or opposition of the world. They can only be taken on the lips of the great and ardent spirits ; the eager chivalry of Christ. The comfortable Christian, snugly wrapped in the decent blankets of tradition ; the religious amorist whose secret orchard fulfils all he can

demand of Heavenly Love—these cannot pass this way. Here come the true squires of the Eternal Wisdom, following their Master to the lists, that they may prove their loyalty and courage. Here, surrendered to "the sufferings of the time," they are rapt to a foretaste of its glory: they find, mysteriously, a gateway which leads them to the murmurous solitudes of God. There the thud of the descending lash beats time to a celestial music; and the heavenly theme of the soul's symphony, "a melody intolerably sweet," is heard through the crash of the world's discords, moving towards its triumphs in the heights. "Worldly lovers," says Rolle, "soothly words or ditties of our song may know, for the words they read; but the tone and sweetness of that song they may not learn." It is known only by those who go with God to the pillar, submitting to those great rhythms of Creation which beat out, through pain and conflict, the harmony which is Eternal Life.

THIRD SORROWFUL MYSTERY

THE CROWN OF THORNS

St Louis brought the Crown of Thorns to Paris, and installed it, with unrecognised appropriateness, in the centre of her seething life; a jewelled symbol of the sovereignty towards which Life, at its best, must ever aspire.

It is the way of humanity to crown its chosen sovereigns with dead things: terrible instruments, wrought with much pain and cunning from the wealth with which it weighs itself down. But when Divine Love broke in on them, those by whom He was despised and rejected did Him, unaware, a greater honour. They took and crowned Him with a diadem torn from the very stuff of life: a diadem

possessing life's dreadful qualities of pain and loveliness, of thorns and flowers. They could not give the one without the other : so, all unwittingly they wreathed His brows with beauty whilst they crowned Him with the cruel chaplet of ignominious pain.

Ego dedi tibi sceptrum regale ; et tu dedisti capiti meo spineam coronam. Heavy with life, it lay upon His head : the imperial crown of humility, won by the agony of the garden and the bitter abasement of the pillar. Even at that hour of coming death, the sap was running in those branches, which seemed so sterile and so hard. The flowery crown of Easter morning is but the thorny crown of Calvary.

The crown of life, then, pressed down upon the brow of life's initiate, is the one great gift the world confers on the growing soul in this dolorous way. Here, in its own despite, it does honour to that Life which it despises and rejects. Paradoxically, as a part of the very process of condemnation,

it proclaims the victory of growing Spirit. It feels the sharpness of the thorns that it inflicts, and rejoices in them: but the budding roses in their axils it cannot see.

"They wove for me a crown of truth, and it caused
Thy branches to bud in me,
For it is not like a withered crown which buddeth not:
But Thou livest upon my head, and Thou hast blossomed upon my head.
Thy fruits are full grown and perfect; they are full of Thy salvation."

"It caused Thy branches to bud in me!" Still the mystery of growth is with the soul, governing its experience even in this dark hour, working in it the wonderful paradox of tribulation, the up-springing of life and beauty beneath the burden of failure and grief. "It is not like a withered crown. . . . Thou livest upon my head." His abounding life dispensed under the strangest of disguises; His benediction resting on the very instruments of most bitter mortification, and making of them the dearest gifts of love.

He demanded of us the subjection of our physical life, the surrender of the body's dignity and power to the purposes of ascending spirit; and according to our self-giving power we gave it. Now, the regnant mind, the piercing intellect that probed the world's secrets, the quick imagination that ran before our feet to look upon the secrets of His love—these dearest qualities of ours, that we wished only to dedicate to His service, to remake in the interests of His life, He takes, as it seems, that He may break and degrade them before the amused and malicious eyes of other men. We must be fools, glad fools, for Christ's sake: all has been given us, and all we must give again. So, after the outward indignity of the scourging the soul must face that more subtle torture, the mockery of the royal crown: the world's most poignant criticism, the act by which it marks its sense of spirit's strangeness and separation—the wild arro-

gance, as it seems, of its pretensions, the irrational absurdity of its dreams. We offer the world our love, and it repays us with a pretended reverence: bowing the knee whilst it steels the heart. It is not ashamed to find immortal spirit "interesting," even in the hour in which it consigns it to the Cross.

Yet against its will, as it were, the world helps the work which must be done within us. It, too, is an instrument held in the sure and skilful hand of God. It is teaching us the "gymnastic of Eternity," the high lessons of the School of Perfect Resignation: making plain the way on which we are to travel, bringing us the only food that can nourish and support our stormy love.

> "Bring thorns for the path of the enthusiast,
> His love would have them daggers"—

and it makes them as sharp as it can, barbs them with ridicule, little knowing that the wounds which they inflict are the secret pathways by which His

love and grace come in : or that the dreadful wreath into which they are platted is the ensign of the soul's eternal sovereignty.

" Christ hath crowned me," said St Agnes in the brothel, " with the bright and priceless blossoms of the Eternal Spring "—sweet radiance, purity, and fruitfulness, His beauty perpetually upspringing, given out of the deeps of bodily degradation for the adornment of the virgin soul. As those who run in the games for a perishable garland, so we have brought our body into subjection, have sought even at the pillar the harsh discipline of the spiritual athlete ; that we may win an imperishable crown. Now at last it is given us ; not under circumstance of outward triumph, but so as our victory may seem to the world defeat.

" From glory to glory advancing, we praise Thee, the Saviour of Souls," as we go from garden to pillar, from the judgment-hall to the cross. We tread a primrose path, though our

eyes are holden : we grow up into the fullness of His stature, our weakness the very condition of His strength. Whether it be the slow process of nature or the deliberate art of man to which we are submitted, " all serveth," says Boehme, "but abundantly to manifest the wonderful works of God, that He for all and in all may be glorified. Yea, all serveth if thou knowest rightly how to use it, only to recollect thee more inwards, and to draw thy spirit into that majestic Light wherein the original patterns and forms of things visible are to be seen. Keep therefore in the Centre, and stir not from the Presence of God revealed within thy soul."

In the Light which fills that secret place is laid up for us the pattern of our imperishable Crown. It is made of roses, wild and fragrant, and " in each rose is written the word Love." To that centre we may retreat, though the world clamour about us, to offer Him the fruits of our surrender, made

manifest in pain. What else indeed is there that we can give, from our poor little treasure-house, so nearly worthy of His acceptance as this? How else could we exhibit the heroic quality of our love? In the deep silence of the growing garden, our wills were made over to His Will, in the judgment-hall of human opinion, our bodies were submitted to the scourge—yes, to anything that might befall them; worse, the purple robe of an inglorious honour was set about our shoulders by those who will never understand. Now, the head made bare for His unction receives the thorny crown, and with it a new and deeper participation in the eternal passion of His Christ. Man's dearest pride, the instrument of his deep thought and piercing vision, the citadel of his power; the secret garden as he fancies, where alone he has rapt communion with his dream—this must taste the humiliation which is more bitter than the pangs of death. Bit

by bit, the Whole Man is to be brought within the magic ring of suffering. The totality of human nature, Body, Soul, and Spirit, must be welded together in the likeness of the humiliation of Christ; that we may follow in His footsteps on the dolorous way which leads to the Father's heart. The Salt, the Sulphur, and the Mercury —all must be cast into pain's crucible. There the fire of love shall transmute them into the substance of the Spiritual Gold.

"'Love not too much.' But how,
When Thou hast made me such,
And dost Thy gifts bestow,
How can I love too much?

Though I must fear to lose,
And drown my joy in care,
With all its thorns I choose
The path of love and prayer."

FOURTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY

THE BEARING OF THE CROSS

When the chivalry of the squire has been tested he may ride with his Lord in the lists. When the education of the climber has prospered, he may set his face towards the hills. So, disciplined in mind and body by the cruelest oppositions which the world of things can offer, pilgrim man must now prepare to leave that world behind him: set out upon his long viaticum of ascent. "The Love of God," says Angela of Foligno, "is never idle; for it constrains us to follow the Way of the Cross." Pressing in on us, transfusing us, encompassing us as an atmosphere, thrusting Life forward on its long quest of Perfection, that stern and tender love compels its children

to the only journey which leads home. It blocks all other paths—so easy and so tempting for us—the way of knowledge, the way of beauty, even the way of human goodness with the rest. The enticement and the pursuit, the companionship and the loneliness, the light and the shadow of the Divine Desire—all these in their interplay force us to one narrow, peopled path; a path of unutterable harshness that leads as it seems to the place of death, yet shall lead us if we trust it to the only country of the soul.

The pilgrimage to Calvary is the third stage in Life's long drama of self-giving; the self-giving upon which the soul resolved when it came forth from the Garden of Prayer. Since we are "made-trinity, like to the unmade blissful Trinity," three-fold must be our self-yielding to its love. "Man," says Tauler, "is just as though he were formed of three men: his animal nature, in which he is guided by his senses; his powers of reason;

and his highest nature, which is in the image and likeness of God." We have left our sensual nature bound to the pillar. Itself a captive, we have no more to fear from its assaults. Our reason we have submitted to that thorny crown of humiliation, which waits for every initiate of the Sorrowful Mysteries of Christ. Now, we must leave both behind us; and, ascending "above reason and beyond reason," "go up alone with the Son into the secret place, the Holy of Holies," that we may offer our utmost sacrifice, that is, our very selves, and enter in, "hiding the secret mind in the mystery of the Divine Abyss." Even whilst the spirit sorrows beneath its burden, it knows that it is going to its Love; that this is the only way to perfect union with the Godhead, the veritable thoroughfare of life. "What ask I of thee more, but that thou study to resign thyself to Me entirely? What thing soever thou givest Me else I care not for."

We stretched our hearts and minds towards Him, blind yet desirous; growing, as we hoped, gently yet from glory to glory in His image, striving towards the fullness of the stature of Christ. Now we begin to feel in its irresistible power the pull of His terrible attraction. Steadily, remorselessly, it draws us along the cruel road that seems to lead to the spiritual death. The Voice says again: "As nothing should suffice thee without Me, likewise nothing may please Me whatsoever thou shalt give, if thou offer not thyself to Me." And we, full of fear yet full of adoration, go forward step by step, driven by that all-conquering impulse; by God without Who calls to God within. His attraction it is that compels us, yet we think that we do it ourselves: as the crumb of steel caught within the magnetic area may congratulate itself upon the swiftness with which it runs to its appointed and inevitable place.

"And all this," says Julian, Diotima

of the Symposium of Christ's lovers, "showed He full blissfully, signifying thus:

"See! I am God: see! I am in all thing: see! I do all thing: see! I lift never mine hands off my works, nor ever shall, without end: see! I lead all thing to the end I ordained it to from without beginning, by the same Might, Wisdom, and Love whereby I made it. How should anything be amiss?"

How indeed should anything be amiss with the soul which is brought to birth in Him? Even on the Sorrowful Way, in manifold failures and humiliations, it lives and moves and has its being within the charmed circle of His grace. Men think that it suffers hell, yet it stands in heaven: for it knows, in the midst of squalor and of anguish, in the midst of its struggles and its falls, that His hands are never lifted from His works. Thus He shapes and thus transmutes us: slowly distilling the perdurable

tincture of Eternity from the crude and unenduring stuff of time. This is His way: and shall we ask another? "Dost thou think to escape what never mortal man might escape? What saint in this world was without cross and tribulation?"

As the joyful mystery of the Visitation, so is the mystery of this slow and bitter climb to death. It is a way of prayer: a mystical ascent to new and close communion with our Master, along the least promising of paths. It is a plumbing of all experience, even the terrible experience of spiritual failure, that we may seek and find Him in the very deeps. It is a way of dark contemplation; for we move as it were in His shadow, yet cannot see Him at our side. We go in great solitude; though the populations of the earth are close about us, and the populations of Eternity are surely there to bless. Out of the midst of our hard climbing, the slow, difficult course—the dust, the heat, the burden,

only actual to us—we look as from an infinite distance, at the world we have known so well. Yet our path lies through that world. The Holy Mountain we are climbing rises amongst its tenements and streeets; and its inhabitants come out to us as we struggle up the steep monotonous pathway, to urge, to help, to grieve. Strange adventures befall us as we plod upwards. Not pain and effort alone shall be our portion. We go through the midst of life; it flows about us, presses upon our consciousness in every shape and form. Sweet human Love meets us; and we turn from her imploring eyes with terror, for she must not withhold us from our destiny. Wayfaring Love meets us, plain and homely; and eases, as none other can, the cruel burden of the Cross. Intuitive Love runs to our encounter, ministers to us in our distress; mysteriously discerning in our features, distorted though they be with weariness and anguish, the

Veritable Image of its Friend. The amateurs of Religious Sentiment meet us ; and perhaps their facile pity is the hardest thing the soul has got to bear. They are interested in its struggle, and follow for a little way, stepping delicately to avoid the mud and stones : but they deplore the ill-regulated enthusiasm which has led to this piteous pass. Religion, they think, should be calm, sweet, and beautiful ; the way that leads to God should be run without dust or heat. They will go home, to weep over their pretty pious books, kneeling upon their comfortable hassocks ; safe as it were in a respectable and stagnant backwater, far from those raging torrents which pour towards the Infinite Sea.

As for the soul brought to this bitter mystery, all its love and will, all its strength and endurance, must now be set upon one point. Desire and thought shall sink almost into abeyance ; so central for its consciousness must be the passionate effort, the

tense determination to bear all things "according to His will." Bit by bit it must struggle upwards, slipping, falling: its manliness is being tested here if ever, under the crushing burden of the saving Cross. The shadow of that Cross lies for it upon Creation, a term which delimits without error the kingdoms of the unreal and the real. "Behold! in the Cross all doth consist." It dominates the lover's consciousness, and reduces all else that cannot live within its radiance to the ranks of the shadowy and the insecure. To bear it, is to bear His primal secret with us; the merciless touchstone of truth, strong even in our utmost weakness. The phantoms fly before it—all the pious fancies, all the ethical pretensions, all the philosophic dreams. "For the word of the Cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but to us that are being saved it is the Power of God"—His Wisdom in a mystery, declaring in inexorable, sternest action that deepest secret of

the universe which shall never be communicated in words. "One desire only," says St John of the Cross, "does God allow and suffer in His Presence: that of perfectly observing His law, and of carrying the Cross of Christ. In the Ark of the Covenant there was but the Book of the Law, the Rod of Aaron, the Pot of Manna. Even so that soul which has no other aim than the perfect observance of the Law of God, and the carrying of the Cross of Christ, will be a true Ark containing the true Manna, which is God."

FIFTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY

THE CRUCIFIXION

Under pressure of its inward impulse to transcendence, that steadfast tendency to deity which nothing can withstand, the pilgrim soul is come to a most still, bare, and desolate place; where it seems that nothing lives but God alone. That achievement of Reality for which it asked, towards which indeed its whole growth has been directed, is at last accomplished in it. The veils of illusion are torn away. Every member is pierced by the wound of Perfect Love, and it is lifted up from the earth into the lonely desert of the Godhead—lifted up upon the saving Cross. Merciless hands have stripped the I, the Me, the Mine, from it; those decent garments which

shrouded the immortal personality within, sheltered its limbs from the sharp air of the supernal sphere. Only the naked spirit in its hour of utmost destitution comes to this altar, and in perfect self-abandonment sets foot upon this ladder to the stars.

> "This is Love! to fly heavenward,
> To rend, every instant, a hundred veils.
> The first moment, to renounce life;
> The last step, to fare without feet."

It is not the consummation towards which spirit had looked at the beginning of its journey: that Divine Manhood, that wholeness of life perfected and completed in Him, toward which the regenerate soul, it thought, should grow. But now that soul has learned that love is enough for it, and that only in the extreme of surrender can love have its perfect work. Like some homing star which has burned its way swifter and ever swifter to the sphere that called it, purged and made shining by the ardour of its flight, it rushes through

the shrouding darkness to its Origin. All its desire now is to be lost in Him. It thinks no more of its own transcendence: of its little separate achievement, its spirituality, its pain. Only it wants to "go forward, and get nearer to the Eternal Goodness" if it can. By effort and sacrifice it would do it, for its love is vital, and wears the colours of chivalry and romance. It asks for difficulties: for opportunity of endurance. In the end no smoother way could have been bearable to it than the Royal Highway of the Cross. The choice, the effort, the self-stripping, the purging and transmuting fires—even the darkness, desolation, and abandonment, the bitterness of the spiritual death—were they not needed, the soul had almost demanded them, that thus it might test for Him its courage and its faith. Here is the true blessedness of spirit's imprisonment in the body, its submission to the imperfections and limitations of the flesh: that so by

heroic effort, by the heavenly romance of self-donation, it might win its way to freedom ; working out its salvation in fear and trembling, yet in the joyous exercise of industrious and courageous love, till the Eternal Christ is disclosed in the fullness of His beauty and His power.

O certe necessarium Adæ peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est ! O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem ! Dear, happy fault, which gave us something to do for Him : oh, deepest secret of divinest music, the disharmony which had to be resolved.

Compelled to the gesture of a boundless generosity, its arms outstretched to the embrace of all things —the evil and the lovely, the clean and the unclean—its heart made wider by the wound which pierced it, thereby to make space for the entrance of His all-demanding love—here it is that the fullness of Creative Energy seizes upon the finite human creature ; here

at last is consummated the spiritual marriage of the soul. Long time the Love without has called to Love within ; but the ramparts of the sense-life must be broken before their mysterious transfusion can take place. A perfect abjection and a total self-spending are asked, as the price of our union with God. Christ Himself showed us this pathway ; and declared to us the paradox of life upspringing from corruption and death. He, the supremely Real, trod first for us this difficult bridge which spans the gulf between Appearance and Reality, and leads from a dying world to the heart of intensest life. Paul, following in His footsteps, turned back his transfigured countenance to cry to us, " Dying, and behold I live ! God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross."

Here the Body and Blood of God were broken and spilt for us ; not alone the bodily expression, the manifestation in Time, but the Spirit of Life itself, " the blood which is the life

thereof," He gave. That pouring out of the Precious Blood, the Divine Life, upon the cross of suffering, renewed on every altar, experienced afresh by every soul that comes face to face with Reality, has ever been discerned by Christians as the condition of salvation for the individual and the race. Life itself was then given—" more abundant life " for the world—a fresh dower of vitality, to stimulate the languid soul to new creative acts.

Accipiens et hunc præclarum Calicem in sanctas ac venerabiles manus suas; item tibi gratias agens benedixit, deditque discipulis suis, dicens: Accipite et bibite ex eo omnes. Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis mei, novi et æterni testamenti; mysterium fidei; qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum. Hæc quotiescumque feceritis, in mei memoriam facietis.

Do this in renewal of My memory, following in the footsteps of life. Give as I have given; freely ye have

received, freely give. All—body, soul, and spirit—is asked of you : a complete offering upon the great altar of the world. In your own interest I ask it : do, that you may know. Nothing can explain to us the mystery of Love and Pain but a sharing of it. Nothing can initiate us into the Life of God which is our peace, if we turn from the cleaving sword of sacrifice and outstretched arms which make up the everlasting mercy of the Cross. The first for rebellious matter, the second for homeward-rushing spirit. Both for Man and Man only—freely offered to him—the instruments of his deification, the signs of a veritable partaking of the life of Christ.

" For He desires," says Ruysbroeck, with the strange and violent imagery of the great mystic who is struggling to describe an intuition which transcends the resources of speech, " He desires to consume our very life, in order that He may change it into His own. . . . Were our eyes keen enough

to see this the avid appetite of Christ, Who hungers for our salvation, all our efforts could not keep us from flying to His open mouth. I seem to speak follies; but all who love will understand. For the love of Jesus is of a noble nature. That which He devours He would feed. When He has utterly devoured us, then it is that He gives Himself to us: and endows us with an eternal hunger and thirst."

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." Yes, but it seems to the fastidious earthly appetite, the feeble, shrinking human creature, that harshest bread and bitter herbs are the matter of this marriage feast; and the narrow bed of the Cross is cruel to those whose members are unmortified. The soul is held there transfixed in the gathering darkness, enduring the terrible assaults of His grace, the agonies of His initiatory caress, "consumed yet quickened by the glance of God." The dark hours

pass, yet it seems that dawn will never come. But even in its despair the loving soul is glad to give itself, for since He asks it, who could demand a better fate ?

" I understood," says Julian of this august experience, " that we be now, in our Lord's meaning, in His Cross with Him in His pains and His passion, dying ; and we, willingly abiding in the same Cross with His help and His grace unto the last point, suddenly He shall change His cheer to us, and we shall be with Him in heaven. Betwixt that one and the other shall be no time, and then shall all be brought to joy."

" All shall be brought to joy." The fire of love at last shall do its perfect work in us ; in the twinkling of an eye we shall be changed. The mystics, casting about for metaphors that shall hint at these strange adventures of the spirit, say that the soul endures upon the Cross not the pains of death but the travail of yet another

birth—a difficult, slow birth, that brings it into the steady radiance of a diviner day. It comes forth from the sheltering womb of nature, in which it has lain so warm, so safe, so blind. The last traces of the earth-life pass from it in its agony: all those unrealities, all those checks upon its truest freedom, which it thought essential to its joy. They are going: and in their wake there go at last the dark night, the loneliness and the horror, expressions one and all of a charity as yet imperfect, which dared not all to hope nor all endure. The dawn comes, and peace with it—the day breaks, shadows flee from us; and all at last is brought to blessedness.

"Passing away, saith my God, passing away;
Winter passeth after the long delay:
New grapes on the vine, new figs on the tender spray.
Turtle calleth turtle in Heaven's May.
Though I tarry, wait for Me, trust Me, watch and pray.
Arise, come away, night is past, and lo, it is day,
My love, My sister, My spouse, thou shalt hear Me say.
Then I answered: Yea."

THE TRIUMPHANT MYSTERIES OF THE SOUL'S ASCENT

FIRST TRIUMPHANT MYSTERY

THE RESURRECTION

Out of that healing darkness in which the soul was lost on Calvary, there steals upon its vision "like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb," the radiant form of a new transfigured life in which it is to share. Gently that life comes forth from the very heart of Earth our Mother: "not with observation," not with the sudden effulgence of the lightning flashing from east to west, but with the mild unhurried majesty of dawn. "Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The flooding tide of His Divine life invades the finite thing reborn in Him, filling to the brim the emptied channels of its surrendered

selfhood, blessing with a new vitality its every faculty and deed: and suddenly in an ecstasy of joy and wonder it knows itself a veritable "partaker of the Divine Nature," remade in Him, "in another form, another glory, another power."

The soul comes from the dereliction and self-naughting of Calvary—from that unimaginable darkness of mind and loneliness of heart—into the world of the Risen Christ: into that everlasting Easter-fact, the Kingdom of Reality ablaze with God, which here and now awaits us. "And after long woe, suddenly our eyes shall be opened, and in clearness of light our sight shall be full." The Angel who met Mary upon Carmel, *Dominus tecum* on his lips: the Angel who was with the soul in its agony, and ministered to it of the Chalice of the Will: the Angel who loves and tends all growing, striving things—he comes once more to initiate the Christian into this new, last stage of his long pilgrimage. Very

early in the morning, as the blessed night, *in quæ terrenis cœlestia, humanis divina junguntur*, fades away, he shall roll back the heavy stone that shut us in that Cave of Illusion, the sepulchre of the earthly imagination. Then we, amazed and exultant, shall come out to see before us a world renewed and yet the same: lit by that new colour known of those who see Creation with the eyes of God. The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come. The birth-pangs of death have done their work. All was then demanded of the soul; its faith, hope, love, fused in one superhuman act of resignation. It gave all, and gladly since He asked it; stripped itself of everything but pain. Now all is restored, full measure and pressed down. Because it gave its life to Him it shall now receive the mighty dower of His vitality. Because it was not afraid to enter His darkness, lit only by the

faint lantern of humble and self-giving love, now it is inundated with the Uncreated Light. As it believed, it poured out for Him its very life-blood : and lo ! there is ichor in its veins. Joy it renounced for Him ; and now it is filled with a wild happiness, the mighty exultation of the Sons of God.

For every soul that follows in His footsteps, that elects the heroic vocation of surrender—the scourge, the rosy crown, the heavy cross—the Easter Garden waits at the end of sorrows, fragrant with unimaginable perfumes, and made lovely with the simplest growing things. Here and now, it stretches out beyond our earthy sepulchre, athwart the teeming streets and huddled houses that seem to shut us from the light. Christ walks in it : and behold ! not all the cohorts of His Father's angels mark His presence, but hedge and coppice breaking into flower. Suddenly from the tomb where our separated life was

laid away, we shall come out into that world, so real and so supernal. Shy and astonished, we shall move with tentative footsteps upon its kindly turf.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord." Green-meshed are the airy vaults of it, and violet-blue its cool and shaded floor. The innocent furred acolytes of His Mysteries go without fear between its aisles; the birds and angels sit together in its trees. A Gardener moves between those borders, and blossoms spring between His wounded feet. New life He radiates, and not alone on human spirits. All Creation waits upon His coming; and where He passes by He brings it peace.

Here at last His veritable encounter is made possible to us: here the deepest secrets of His Love are declared to us under the simplest accidents of natural life. "My beloved is mine, and I am His: He feedeth among the lilies." As the veil that

hangs before the Tabernacle, so do these dew-drenched branches, so does this heavenly inflorescence, shroud the gateway to the Garden of His joy. "My secret to myself": once more for a space the soul is alone with it; alone with the whispered messages of morning, the hushed ecstasies of life. Only the radiant wounds that bless its members remind it of the torments of the past. "In the House of its Friend" it received them. This at last it knows, and knowing, does not seek to understand: for now it is "one thing with Him," buried with Him, risen with Him—at last its life is hidden with Christ in God. Human love comes to meet it; but in this rapt and sacred hour the soul must cry, "Touch me not," for another contact is about its limbs. God enfolds it as an atmosphere: it stands on earth, and yet it lives in heaven.

What, then, is it to mean for us, this Resurrection-life of the transfigured soul, remade upon the levels

of Reality? What did it mean for our Master, in the matchless hour of His return, when He walked the solitary garden and communed with its still and fragrant life? It meant a coming back to earth of that deified spirit which was caught into the arms of God in its utmost surrender: a deliberate reversion, in the fullness of its power, in the ardour of its burning charity, to the plane of the shadowy, the imperfect, the unreal. It meant the beginning of the Eternal Return which the Holy Eucharist makes actual to us; a self-spending, a giving of Himself under the humblest limitations, that He may be food for the very life of men. This it is that makes us certain of the perfection of Christ's union with the Father—not His ineffable immersion in that Divine Reality, but His sweet and steady care for littlest human interests, the undistorted love which led Him to transfigure with His presence the poor diurnal life of common things.

He does not disdain to entice with gentlest intimacies our reluctant faith and trust. He comes into our midst and shows to us the wounds on His creative hands, His untiring feet; even the way that leads to His sacred heart. We find Him in the solitary mountain. He stands among us on the shore. He is a Guest at our table, and ministers to us the hidden manna, the very substance of His life. He accepts even the fruits of our poor labours—gentlest of all the courtesies of God. Not for His own sake, but for the sake of humanity He returns to us; returns to the patient earth, His mother and ours. There in the early morning He comes to meet us, bearing that banner of our redemption which is the ensign of His triumph and our hope; proof that the Path-finder has found a way. There He nests in the heart of life and waits our search of Him, waits till he can again come to birth in the arid and reluctant human soul.

"Tell us where the Lord sojourneth,
For we find an empty tomb.
Whence He sprung, there He returneth,
Mystic Sun, the Virgin's womb.
Hidden Sun, His beams so near us,
Cloud-empillared as He was,
From of old there He, Ischyros,
Waits our search, Athanatos."

It is the dearest ambition of the Christian, the final evidence of consecrated love, that the Easter-fact may be manifest in him also, even under the veils and limitations of the flesh. He too would live in the interests of humanity the transfigured life in the here-and-now. Since there dwells in his heart the very presence of the Strong and the Immortal, he desires that this strength and immortality may be his own, to spend for other men.

Surely here the desire of man encounters the desire of God which runs to meet it. From the Easter-fact, transcendent life is indeed poured out on us, to take and make our own and spend again. It streams upon us

from the altar: it meets us in the silence of the hills; it buds mysteriously within the soul. Yet not for our own sakes is it given us; rather that we may follow in the steps of our Pattern, and go back to entincture with new gold the desirous world of men. For love's sake we shall return to them, in their midst our true, completed life shall be manifest; here, not in some far-off region of the "spiritual," begin the triumphant mysteries of His Grace. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." They shall flow out into the sad and sterile tracts of earth, to heal, to fertilise, to make fragrant, giving news of the secret place from which they come: the heavenly garden, everywhere awaiting us, where Love and Wisdom meet in the heart of the Living God.

SECOND TRIUMPHANT MYSTERY

THE ASCENSION

The life of the regenerate spirit—that Christ-like thing which agonised and died, that it might rise within the soul to greater glory—is like a well of living water perpetually uprising, pouring itself out in diurnal acts of benediction towards men. It cannot fade or tire, it cannot fluctuate; for the deep springs of its being are fed perpetually by the fontal and exuberant Life of God. It moves in a transfigured world, it touches all things to fresh power and loveliness; endows them with its sacramental life.

Yet this, its royal new approach to things created, has at once its counterpart and its origin in a new approach now made possible for it towards the

uncreated sphere. Not of its own strength, but because of its eternal attachments made perfect, its mighty outward swing to the Unseen, does it live the risen life within the world; because of the consummation of that union to which the discipline of prayer has slowly led. Hence it is natural that this same growing life of prayer, the heavenly correspondence which alone supports and makes possible the fruitful correspondences of earth, should demand its own expression, a space made clear for its peculiar activities, within the circle of the transfigured life.

Bit by bit, yet very gently, we are led into all the wonders of that new existence. So great is the reverence of our Lover for the littleness and ignorance of the soul, so matchless the humility of God, that He chooses to await the slow discovery of that spirit whom he has made only for Himself. His companionship waits ever at the margin of the mind. But

that mind must turn to Him if it would know all the splendours of communion: going up with the sharp dart of longing love from the created to the uncreated sphere. This act, the act of prayer made perfect, has now become for it the highest of all arts, the Science of all Sciences, the Romance in which all longings are fulfilled. So we need not be astonished that the passion for the Real often seizes upon the soul, rapturously and suddenly: abruptly inducts the citizen into the Heavenly Country, catches him from the earth and inundates him with the Uncreated Light. In swift ascents of joy his love will go out toward that Love of God which rushes in to meet it: that so the Loved and Lover may at last be made "one thing."

"In a place beyond uttermost Place, in a track without shadow of trace,
Soul and body transcended, I live in the soul of my Loved One anew!"

Such is the experience of the soul's true ecstasy; such the Ascension

which it makes to the Father, as the pioneer of growing mounting life. Like a bird, says St Gregory, was the ascent of our Forerunner, swiftly and easily borne upward on the feathers of fine love—"and the path of that Bird knoweth no man, who believeth not in the ascension into heaven."

This is the third of Love's mysterious ascents towards Reality; the third journey of that insatiable adventurer up the Mountain of Contemplation. The first time, it went on an errand of courtesy bearing the seed of a life as yet unborn; and its prayer was the prayer of simplicity, a glad confession of joy and faith. The second time it went on an errand of sacrifice, bearing the cruel burden of the Cross; and its prayer was an act of pure surrender to the Will. Now, for the last time, it goes up in triumph, free, unfettered: and its prayer is the ecstatic upward rush of the winged spirit, borne by its simplicity and its

purity made perfect to immediate union with the Heart of God.

"A man," says Thomas à Kempis, "is lifted up from earthly things with two wings: they are simplicity and purity. Simplicity ought to be in intention; purity in affection. Simplicity intendeth God, purity taketh Him and tasteth Him."

Simplicity, that is singleness of eye, looks upon God; sees Him in all and above all, the one Transcendent Fact of many facets, outside of Whom is no existence, and in Whom is no darkness at all. Purity, that is singleness of heart, receives and tastes Him; undistracted by any conflict of desires. On these two wings the spirit, remade in Christ, takes flight toward the Eternal, to that superessential Being in which all life has its beginning and its end; there to enjoy as the term of its difficult ascents a veritable fruition of the Absolute.

"He hath set His Beauty above the stars: His loveliness is in the clouds

of heaven." Only by a forsaking and overpassing of the earth-life can we truly know it: by a lifting up of the heart towards its home. Not the unresting and immanent Love that works and watches within the framework of the here-and-now, but an utterly transcendent Truth and Beauty, which alone may satisfy our craving, calls us upwards. We are drawn to some unspeakable region, to some imageless experience, where, on the pivot of all time and space, our hunger and thirst for God shall at last be stilled. "This deification and elevation of the spirit in God," says St John of the Cross, "whereby the soul is, as it were rapt and absorbed in love, made one with God, suffers it not to dwell upon any worldly matter. The soul is now detached, not only from all outward things, but even from itself: it is, as it were, undone, assumed by, and dissolved in, Love. The which is to say, that it passes out of itself into the Beloved."

"*Into* the beloved"—into the Ocean of Godhead, into the Fathomless Abyss. Thither He was caught up from the summits of contemplation; "And a cloud received Him out of their sight." No human eye shall look upon that joyous consummation: no human mind shall penetrate the wonder of the mystic's ecstasy. If we go up with Jesus to the high summit of our spirit, to the mountain of the imageless fact, if we follow Him with the rapt gaze of simplicity, with that intimate and eager comradeship, up the steep slopes of our ascending love; then, led of Him, in Him, through Him, our veritable ascension may be accomplished—that paradoxical ascension of the Christian consciousness, which is really the humblest of descents. "To be immersed in humility is to be immersed in God." This is the triumph of complete self-loss, when at last the soul can say with Catherine, "My Me is God, nor do I know my self-

hood out of Him." Then we, not knowing what befalls us, deep hidden in the Cloud of Unknowing, shall indeed for one unspeakable and transient moment "meet the Lord in the air." Then it is that exultant joy shall have its perfect work in us; snatching us from the tame fields of the "reasonable" and enfolding us in that radiant darkness which hides the supremely happy from the sight of other men.

Those other men, so wistful and so eager, long to understand, if they may not experience, these strange and wild adventures of the soul. But the spiritual marriage is not to be accomplished before the astonished eyes of the looker-on. This is the dearest secret of supremest love: and He is a "bashful lover, that His sweetheart before men entreats not." Darkness was on Calvary when first the spirit felt His "terrible initiatory caress." Now in the hour of its ecstatic union a shining cloud receives it, dark with

excess of light. It knows not where it may be, for every landmark is transcended: giving and receiving have become for it meaningless and unintelligible words. It has passed from contemplation to fruition: is immersed as for the time of its ecstasy in the silent music and the murmurous solitude of God. In that swift act of spiritual union, that brief immersion in Eternity, He communicates to the soul Life, Knowledge, and Beatitude: then all is consummated, all is renewed. Baptized into the embraces of Love, above all reason, above all knowledge, only under the veils of highest poetry can it report to us the faint outline of its wonder and its joy.

THIRD TRIUMPHANT MYSTERY

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The mysteries of the Ascension and of Pentecost, taken together, may well represent to us the necessary double action of the complete and wholly conscious human spirit: its solitary and prayerful ascents to God, its eager and outflowing activity towards the world of men. "The possession of God," says Ruysbroeck, "demands and supposes a perpetual activity": each upward rush towards communion with His Perfect Beauty involves a return to the restless and imperfect world of Becoming, a sharing in the creative industries of His Immanent Love.

There have been mystics who fancied that the ecstatic ascent to Pure Being,

that *Mentis alienatio* which seemed to Richard of St Victor the perfect consummation of all prayer, was the end of the soul's career. They held that those whom Beatrice led up the Celestial Ladder were not destined to come down again; thus passing a sentence of sterility upon the spiritual marriage of the soul. But the true ecstasy of the contemplative snatched up to fruition of God is an ascent undertaken in the interests of humanity, even as our Forerunner ascended in order that "the Paraclete might come." Every Christian soul is brother to Prometheus, and seeks the heavenly fire, not for his own glory but because he must transmit it to the race. He is a thoroughfare: a completed self, but not, for that very reason, self-sufficing: doubly dependent, rather, on the vivifying grace that he receives and on the eager service that he gives. Thus the ascension into heaven was but the opening episode of Divine Humanity's true and eternal activities:

the condition of that fecundity, that unexhaustible self-spending, that power of spiritual creation, proper to a life which is fulfilled of God. He that has made ascensions to the Father, let the proof of his transcendence be a humble and willing return to the sphere of illusion, as a part of that great spiritual chivalry, that knighthood of the Paraclete, which defends and guides and strengthens life on its upward path.

There is here then no selfish abstraction from the actual, no deliberate neglect of the lovely life of service which is Christ's; but one-half of the completed self-expression of man in his wholeness, that citizen of time and of Eternity, "swinging between the Unseen and the Seen." The transfigured life, the new universe to which he has been lifted, the One by Whom that life and universe are filled, demand of the new man a wholeness of response: a world-renouncing response to Love Transcendent ever

enticing him, a world-accepting response to Love Immanent, which ever calls him to share and to comfort the pain and weakness of created things. Humblest charity, highest contemplation: these are the facets of that crystal which shall reflect the Inaccessible Light.

But these difficult responses to Finite and to Infinite shall and must depend on a constant renewal and refreshing; on a contact with the Transcendent "never to be lost or broken," on a conscious self-mergence of the soul "as a fish in the sea, as a bird in the air," in the Infinite Being of God. They shall depend on the soul's continual nurture by His feeding and inflowing Grace: given in the days of our weakness as dew upon the tender grass, and in the stormy times of our adolescence as the drenching vivifying showers; now sweeping as a mighty wind through the airy kingdoms of the spirit, and blessing, fertilising, where it goes.

Jacob Boehme, that deep gazer into the secrets of God, has somewhere a mysterious saying about the "Outflown Word": an image, as it were, of the Divine Wisdom rushing out as a great wind from its own centre and passing through the meshes of the Cosmos, a swift and searching tempest of life. That wind blows where it lists, filling with its sound the whole world of Becoming; sometimes a storm of inspiration, sometimes a murmurous and refreshing breeze. Earth treads her cyclic path about the floor of heaven enfolded in the music of its gale. It stirs in all natural things and compels them to a manifestation of its beauty. It collects and it scatters. It enables and it slays. It moves the souls of men who know it not, evoking in them diversities of gifts.

The winds of the world in their passage move to new and various qualities of loveliness each living thing they touch. They toss the great

boughs into the air and fill them with a wild and passionate delight. They dapple with delicate and shaded glories the surface of the fields. They stir the grave wheat to measured rhythms, make a fringed mystery of the barley, give to the oats a delicate playfulness, an elfin quality of life. They drive the cloudy castles over the long savannahs of the blue. Everywhere they inspire change, life, movement; forcing the sap upwards through the living, swaying branches, shaking the fertile pollen from the flowers, stirring thought and passion, giving beauty for ashes, music for silence, energising enthusiastically in the interests of Eternal Wisdom and Eternal Joy.

"As the hand moves over the harp and the strings speak, so speaks in my members the Spirit of the Lord, and I speak by His Love."

The psalm of that perpetual adoration can be heard of all in sea and forest. No less, in the angels' ears,

its acceptable melody may be discerned in the home and cloister, in the studio, the workshop, and the shrine. To some participation in this angelic awareness of the Wind of God our new life must introduce us: to a natural and active world, swept everywhere by those untamed and vital breezes—a world that is in all its activities inspired.

This new and unifying consciousness of Spirit, comes to us from without; completing for us the Trinity in Unity of a reality that is and must be conterminous with God. In the joys of the spiritual childhood we have known His care and protection as a Father. In a sharing of His sufferings and His efforts, we have known the travail of the Son. Now in our maturity we know Him as Omnipresent Spirit, the one Reality of all that is: and we ask for the fullness of that Spirit to be upon us, that we may live with the full span of its immortal and creative life.

"Wild Spirit which art moving everywhere,
Destroyer and Preserver, hear, O hear!"

And our prayer is answered, since it is made in lowliness of heart. Suddenly His life is amongst us in its fullness. It penetrates the world of things, and lights on us as we sit amongst our kind. As flaming fire, as rushing wind, it seems to us in its power and wonder. We are changed by its advent; the hard edges of personality are broken. We find new doors set wide in the encompassing walls of our selfhood; the gift of many tongues, new and various possibilities of expression, new instruments of communion with our fellow-men. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions"—all the splendid possibilities of seer and artist, of the philosopher, musician, and poet, of the revealers of beauty, the deep

gazers into things Divine, are included in the Pentecostal gift. His hand sweeps our strings, and evokes new music which we did not dream that we possessed.

But above all it shall sting us to service: to a flaming enthusiasm of ministry, to a declaration and expression of the unsearchable riches of God. His word is with power: it is a dynamic force in those whom it has entinctured, pressing them on to a glad and eager co-operation in the Divine Plan. Part of His mystical body now, they would not be idle members,—" would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man." The adult spirit looks upon a new world; yet all about it are its brothers, whose eyes are sealed to the ever-present landscape of Reality. New astounding deeps of experience must be declared to them; and for this, new contacts and mutual understandings must be set up. The arduous communication of the secret of Eternity to each man in

a language that he can understand—the language of Science, the language of Beauty, the language of Love—bridges flung out on all sides between the soul of the mystic and other souls of all races, grades, and faiths—universal and exuberant self-donation: this only is the earnest of a life that has attained to its full stature, the mark of man's acceptance as fellow-craftsman with Christ. "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you." Here, through and by the soul that it transfigures, made now the elect vessel of grace, we behold the eternal return, the sudden and generous flowering of the omnipotent Spirit of Love.

Not for nothing did the old painters put our Lady in the very centre of the Pentecostal scene. The soul that has borne God shall spend God. She is the supreme thoroughfare of the Divine Life; and because of the perfection of her union with that life, she receives more abundantly its renewal

and its energising fire. Dear, human, and maternal life is here transfigured and made vocative: not merely by the inrush of Divine power and the flooding tide of spirit, but by that greater gift of flaming charity which is the only language of the heart.

Power and charity; the will and the heart blessed to His service, all barriers broken that His Love may pour through us, and be poured out by our human ministry upon all flesh. A universal and fraternal communion is here asked of us: in such a communion the inexpressible gift of His inrushing spirit is first felt. Here, then, is something new in the soul's adventures. Here is forced on it the fusion, not only with God, but with other men in Him: the social experience of Reality, the social act of communion and of prayer. Dependent here as ever on the hard and eager work of the individual will, yet the result which is attained is no merely individual achievement. Of all, through all, in

all, the flooding tide of the Eternal Life is felt. "*Orate fratres*," says the priest at the altar, "*ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentum.*" Set your wills with mine towards the Father; buoy up my little prayer upon your wings. Here is the root of all corporate worship exhibited, and here in this mystery its part in the triumph of life is expressed: the anxious, prayerful, loyal ranks of the Apostles, with the Virgin Mother in the midst; diverse in temperament, diverse in power and vision, yet here welded together in one great instrument, one Body for the Spirit of Christ. Here Mary, who alone on Carmel had been found in her lowliness worthy to be the Mother of her God, humbles herself anew to a dependence on, a co-operation with all those whom that Life which she bore and nurtured has entinctured and redeemed.

Such corporate prayer is in strong souls and pure the highest exercise

of charity : in weak souls the glad and humble acceptance of a priceless gift. It is the mark and bond of fraternal love, the bearing of one another's burdens, the perfect fulfilment of the Law of Life. "Alone to the Alone," said the Pagan mystic, and knew than this no closer approximation to the Real. "*Væ soli,*" says the Christian. We seek not the flame of separation. *Accendat in nobis Dominus ignem sui amoris, et flammam æternæ caritatis !* We seek that fire which is the fount of life, the flame of eternal charity ; in which, as live coals, "we are burned up by God on the hearth of His infinite love."

FOURTH TRIUMPHANT MYSTERY

THE ASSUMPTION

"*Allons* to that which is endless as it was beginningless" says Whitman. Here is the wayfarer's motto, the rule of the Spiral Road. The homely human life remade, the transient ecstasy of perfect contemplation, even the fertile and inspired career of charity —these cannot content the soul's deepest craving for a perfect fruition of and response to the Beloved. Dante found in the freshness and beauty of the Earthly Paradise no continuing city, but sought at once the Ladder to the Stars; and so it is with every pilgrim of the Infinite who has at last attained the summit of the purging mount of prayer. He too goes up in order that he may "lose himself upon

the heights." His newly-anointed senses demand some unalloyed objective; the fire of his all-conquering love demands eternal union with a greater flame. "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God," and nothing less than this total self-loss in Him can suffice them. He who is here discerned beneath veils, and because discerned, so passionately desired, the mystic would encounter face to face. "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart is restless." From Him we came: to Him we must return. Only in His presence is fullness of joy—

> *"Però che il ben, ch'è del volere oblietto*
> *tutto s'accoglie in lei, e fuor di quella*
> *è difettivo ciò che lì è perfetto."*

Hence it is that the event which common sense had called the "falling asleep" of Mary, our pattern and our mother, that uncommon sense which is the soul's true instinct for Reality has called her "raising up." For indeed, it is less a sleep than an awaken-

ing. The emphasis is not upon the laying down to rest of the wearied mind and body at the end of our little busy human day, but rather upon the exultant liberation and uprushing of freed spirit to its home. Men speak of the soul's achievement of this freedom, as of a dreadful rending of that soul from body, the shedding of the essential characters of personality at the bidding of corruption, weakness, death. But it is of the very essence of the story of the Assumption that Mary is here declared to take with her in that last, supremest flight, not some attenuated "spiritual principle" — rather all that we feel most warmly human and most dear.

"Transit ad æthera, virgo puerpera, virgula Jesse,
Non sine corpore, sed sine tempore, tendit adesse."

Humanity in its wholeness is here lifted up into life eternal, into the spiritual Kingdom of the Son of God.

True, that Kingdom is here-and-now, immanent in all things; for heaven, as the mystics tell us, is "a

temper not a place," and those who dwell in Christ are there already, though still "entangled in the flesh." In no far land need we seek it; "where the body lies, there is heaven and hell." Yet an assumption there must be, a catching up of created to Creator, not of its own strength and volition, but by surrender to His attractive power, if the soul's cyclic history is to come to its appointed end. Those who have skill to read may find hidden in this mystery the final secret of transcendence; the august declaration of the veritable nature of Man. *Maria Virgo assumpta est ad æthereum thalamum, in quo rex regum stellato sedet solio.* As the nun who kneels before the Tabernacle is caught to communion with a timeless, spaceless Presence, sees the "flaming ramparts" shrink and fade away; so the incarnate genius of humanity entering at last into perfect fruition of the Being of God.

What is that fruition? The mystics try in vain to tell us: for a mighty

gulf is fixed between their mind and ours. "Above all knowledge," says Ruysbroeck, of that summit of the soul's transcendence — even the high language of poetry breaking as it were in his hands — "I feel, I discover, I surprise a bottomless and limitless abyss of darkness, that transcends all qualities, that transcends the names of all created things, that transcends the very names of God. Behold! this is that death, that ecstasy of transcendence, that evanishment of all that is most sublime into the One Eternal Mystery, that hoped-for peace which we discern in the deeps of our being, far superior to all external worlds." This is the "Divine Dark" of the great mystics: dim to the earth-trained intellect, most radiant to the heavenward-tending heart. It is the "peace that passeth understanding" of the saints: the dim silence where all lovers lose themselves. Even in our exile we may sometimes look at it, as Plato's prisoners peeping from their

cave. But the spirit whose education is finished, who has trod the long way in faith and hope and love, shall come out from this cave to that sunlight "dark with excess of bright" to find that it is no mere Vision, but a Home. That burning prayer of Christ—that all may be one as He and the Father are one, humanity sharing in fact as in name the consummation of its Priest and King—this demands the assumption, the induction of the spirit into that state or region; and receives its perfect demonstration in the "beating Godward" of the humble yet exultant Mother of the Divine Grace. In this act she completes the spiral way which links Divine and human: dying, and behold! she lives indeed.

"At last thou hast departed, and gone to the Unseen;
'Tis marvellous by what way thou wentest from the world.
Thou didst strongly shake thy wings and feathers, and, having broken thy cage,
Didst take to the air and journey towards the world of soul."

She could not help but fly to Him, once the links that bound her to the earth were severed. *Exaltavit humiles.* So little and light she was, so meek and humble, that nothing opposed the steadfast attraction of God. "I was caught up to Thee," said the storm-tossed Augustine, "by Thy Beauty, and dragged back again by my own weight." But the downward pull of selfhood is lifted from the utterly self-naughted soul. "Pure and illuminated," says an old mystic, "she sees nor God nor herself: but God sees this of Him, in her, for her, withouten her; that shows her that there is none but He. Nor she knows but Him, nor she loves but Him, nor she praises but Him, for there is but He." Her weight is her love, and bears her without deflection to the only compelling Centre of the Universe.

In the beautiful old legend of the life and death of Mary, it is said that flowering lilies were found within the

tomb where her body had been laid to rest; new life and loveliness upspringing even to the last from the contact of that pure meekness with the world. But the body itself, the tangible witness to them of her presence, those who had loved her found not any more. *Emigravit!* it was hidden with Christ in God. And Thomas, the careful carpenter, who proved all things by rule and square, looked in the sepulchre and could not believe: for there was nothing on which he could lay hold. The careful dialectic of an intellect apt at the affairs of time and space failed here, and left him in the lurch. Then, says the dear and graceful story, a sign was given him: a sign that the promise of God was true, that Mary lived indeed, and in her all other souls surrendered to His Will. The girdle of her virginity, the zone that circled and fenced in her dedicated life, was let down as it were a link from heaven to earth—witness that its office was fulfilled, since all

separations were transcended: that her life was at last become one with the life of the All. "If I embrace Him, I shall be virgin indeed." The primal paradox of fruitful purity is established once more, as in the Annunciation; the flaming secret at the heart of things.

Yet not alone as the uniquely chosen Mother of Christ is Mary made a partaker of the Divine Nature. She is the firstfruits and completion of the Incarnation, the key to all cosmic meanings, an earnest of the perfect indwelling of humanity in God. She goes up, then, as type and harbinger of the race which has struggled in her footsteps up the difficult mountain of self-knowledge and prayer—more, of all creation groaning and travailing even until now, awaiting the transmuting of all things in the Divine image, the perfect manifestation of the liberty of the children of God. The poet sees her thus, going up from the ocean of Becoming; set

about with the banners of victory, and bearing in her hands the brimming chalice of intensest life.

" Who is She, in candid vesture,
Rushing up from out the brine ?
Treading with resilient gesture
Air, and with that Cup Divine ?
She in us and we in her are
Beating Godward : all that pine.
Lo ! a wonder and a terror !
The Sun hath blushed the Sea to wine !
He the Anteros and Eros,
She the Bride and Spirit : for
Now the days of promise near us,
And the sea shall be no more."

FIFTH TRIUMPHANT MYSTERY

THE CORONATION

The Spiral Way has reached its consummation, and we find that consummation to be one with the great work of the Crucible, as it was conceived by the spiritual alchemists in the past. It is the heavenly work of Love Triumphant: energising love, which is the life of God within the heart. That Mercury of the Wise, the vital principle of growth and change, working in secret, has subdued all things to the measure of its glory: has turned the raw stuff of human nature into alchemic gold. The end of that mystic process, said the hermetic masters, is the raising of the Crowned Queen — Luna, perfected human nature, bride and mirror of the Sun—

to a sharing in the splendour of her King. "Lo, behold! I will open to thee a mystery, cries the Adept, the Bridegroom crowneth the Bride of the North." The story of the Coronation of Mary, for them as for us, concealed the mystery of all transcendence. It imaged for them the final consummation of the Spiritual Marriage, the fulfilment of our racial destiny, the utter self-mergence of the soul in the Divine. All other stages of the Way had been but a preparation for this. Here life comes to full circle: and highest and lowest, in the bonds of love, are seen to be one thing.

We have followed the soul's life from its first humble act of receptivity, its first simple, eager act of prayer. We have followed the Divine Adventure through the years of natural growth and the years of conscious toil and effort, through weakness and agony, through failure and high triumph—out into the world and back again to the heart of the Living God.

Now we see it: the whole cyclic story of the soul accomplished, the crowned Queen of Angels, fellow-partner with the Divine Goodness, enthroned above time and place at the very apex of Reality.

"And the Chanter of Chanters entuned more excellently above all others, saying: Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come from Lebanon, come, thou shalt be crowned. And she said: I come, for in the beginning of the book it is written of me, that I should do Thy will, for my spirit hath joyed in Thee, God of my health."

"For in the beginning of the book it is written of me, that I should do Thy will"—Mary, the humble maiden, perfect thoroughfare of the Divine Idea. Her destiny was fixed in that first willing act of surrender, that opening of her heart to the inflowing Spirit of Life. *Fiat voluntas tua;* and His Will is a remaking of humanity in His image, a fusion of divine and human, of Creator and Created—the

union of the Spirit and the Bride. Therein alone the soul discovers her own being; often glimpsed, yet never apprehended, amongst the shifting illusions of earth. In Thy Light shall we see light: in Thy Reality we shall be real. Not of our own strength and power can we ever do it: but by a total appropriation of the heritage stored up for us in Christ.

Of that heritage we have received the earnest-money, in the dowers of grace which helped us on our way. It is His strength within us that has borne us upwards; the starry stranger nesting in our soul. Not in virtue of any private Divine quality, but as the mother of her God, Mary receives the diadem of Everlasting Life. It is His own triumph—the supreme achievement of the Creative Artist wrought within her—that He crowns.

Within that Artist's mind was conceived her image: there it lay hid in its immaculate perfection, "from before the foundations of the world."

"Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the true man?" cries Peer Gynt—poor, hapless wanderer, distracted by many imaginations—in the last, most crucial moment of his life. "Where was I, with God's sigil upon my brow?" And Solveig, who has waited and trusted in defiance of all appearance, replies to him, "In my faith—in my hope—in my love!" It is the voice of the Divine Wisdom that seems here to speak by a woman's lips. There, in His Heart, lies the true being of humanity: defended against all assaults of circumstance by the invulnerable optimism of God.

"Thou hast written me in the book of Thy Godhead,
Thou hast depicted me upon Thy Manhood."

There the image of all that we might be is treasured. Thither we must go, to be conformed to that secret Pattern, if we would find our true selves at last: make actual the transcendent personality which every Christian has in Christ. There, in that transfigured humanity, we are gathered up; there,

as the beggar maid by Cophetua, we are crowned. We "come to ourselves" indeed: to find in dependence on God the essence of our long-sought liberty and in His eternal service that perfect freedom which belongs only to the prisoners of love.

And now we see why it is that His grace can only be upon the humble. *Exaltavit humiles:* for they alone resist not, nor oppose with their cleverness the mysterious operations of the Will. They claim not to do "anything of themselves" and hence are the instruments of His pleasure, the elect vessels of His inflowing Life. When one of these, says Mechthild of Magdeburg, completes her journey and is caught up to God, she can no longer remember the earth and the sorrows of the past. She cares nothing for her glory, nothing for the battles she has won. But she takes the crown from her head, and lays it amongst the roses at His Feet; and asks only one thing, that she may come a little

nearer. Then she is taken into the Arms of God; and He looks into her face and embraces her. In that embrace, she is caught to the Highest Height, above all choirs of angels: overpassing in her swift ascent Thrones, Dominations, Powers, her excess of humility transcending in knowledge and in love the very Cherubin and Seraphim who whirl in unending ecstasy about the splendour of the One. The Tree of Life has shot up to the highest heaven, and now at last it bears its flower.

> *"Quivi e la Rosa in che il Verbo divino Carne si fece."*

As the Communion of Saints is consummated in Mary, so in the Divine Humanity made perfect, the bodily expression of the Word, there is added up all the aspirations and potentialities of the race. They have a part in her victory; within the final flower of her achievement they find their meaning and their rest. She is the Mystic Rose of many petals: all

living things that tend to God are gathered in her heart—

> *"Nel giallo della Rosa sempiterna,*
> *che si dilata, digrade, e redole*
> *odor di lode al sol che sempre verna."*

Within that Mystic Rose, Dante saw Eve, siting at the feet of Mary: healed and made radiant by the reflection of her transfigured countenance. Natural Life, the Mother of Men, in all her strength and splendour, here finds her appointed place. Do what she will, she cannot of her own power come nearer: cannot with her own hand heal the wound of separation that she made. Yet there shall be born of her, and of all to whom her germinal life has been communicated, a Life Transcendent, *umile ed alta più che creatura:* by whose humble receptivity, by whose eager self-donation, her loss may be redeemed. The story of the little girl who ran to God on Carmel, the glad yet timid phrases of self-surrender on her lips, may be read by us as the story of every soul

achieving dedication. She is for us the pioneer of creation : the harbinger of an exiled nation going home. She set her feet upon that Spiral Way which links the deeps and heights, the worlds of Becoming and of Being : and finds its goal at last in the flaming heart of Reality—Eternal Truth, true Love, and loved Eternity.

NOTES

SOURCES AND TRANSLATIONS OF LATIN AND ITALIAN PASSAGES IN THE TEXT

P. 25.

"If I love Him I shall be chaste,
If I touch Him I shall be clean,
If I embrace Him I shall be virgin indeed."

(Roman Breviary: Matins of the Feast of St Agnes: Third Responsary.)

Ibid. "O happy mind and blessed soul, that is found worthy to receive Thee, its Lord and God, and in receiving Thee, to be fulfilled with spiritual joy! O how great a Lord it entertains, how dear a Guest brings in, how joyous a Comrade receives, how faithful a Friend does welcome, how lovely and noble a Bridegroom does embrace: even Him who is to be loved before all things that are beloved, and above all things that are to be desired!" (*De Imitatione Christi*, L. IV., cap. 3.)

P. 30. "O Lord my God, my Creator, and my Redeemer, with such affection, reverence, praise, and honour; with such gratitude, worthiness, and love; with such faith, hope, and purity; do I desire

to receive Thee this day, as Thy most Holy Mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, received and desired Thee: when to the angel who brought her the glad tidings of the Mystery of the Incarnation she humbly and devoutly replied, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." (*De Imitatione Christi*, L. IV., cap. 17.)

P. 38. "Christ hath flowered in stainless flesh, therefore let human nature rejoice. O human nature, how wert thou dimmed! Thou hadst become like faded grass; but thy Bridegroom hath renewed thee, therefore be not ungrateful to such a lover. This Lover is flower of purity, born in the meadow of virginity; He is the lily of humanity, of sweetness, and of perfect fragrance." (Jacopone da Todi: Lauda C.)

P. 40. "Oh, how great a mystery, how wonderful a sacrament, that the beasts should have seen the newborn Lord, lying in a manger!" (Roman Breviary: Matins of Christmas Day: Fourth Responsary.)

P. 42. "To-day Christ is born, to-day the Saviour appears!" (Roman Breviary: Second Vespers of Christmas Day: Antiphon of the Magnificat.)

P. 58. "Compelled not by necessity, but by love." (*De Imitatione Christi*, L. III., cap. 18.)

P. 70. "If thou art willing to suffer no opposition, how wilt thou be the friend of Christ?" (*De Imitatione Christi*, L. II., cap. 1.)

P. 80. "When thou shalt come to this state, that tribulation is sweet to thee, and thou dost relish it for Christ's sake: then think it to be well with thee,

for thou hast found Paradise on earth." (*Ibid.*, L. II., cap. 12.)

P. 88. "I fed thee with manna in the desert; and thou hast beaten Me with buffet and scourge." (Roman Missal: Office for Good Friday.)

P. 94. "I gave to thee the royal sceptre: and thou hast given to My head the Crown of Thorns." (*Ibid.*)

P. 115. "Oh surely needful was the sin of Adam, which was blotted out by the death of Christ! Oh happy fault, which was worthy of such, and of so great a ransom!" (Roman Missal: Office for Holy Saturday: Exultet.)

P. 117. "Taking also this excellent Chalice into His holy and venerable hands, and giving thanks to Thee, He blessed and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, and drink ye all of this. For this is the Chalice of my Blood, the new and eternal testament; the mystery of faith; which shall be shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. As often as ye do these things, ye shall do them in remembrance of Me." (Roman Missal: Canon of the Mass.)

P. 127. "Wherein are untied the earthly and the heavenly; the human and the Divine." (Roman Missal: Office for Holy Saturday: Exultet.)

P. 155. "Pray, my brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty." (Roman Missal: Ordinary of the Mass.)

P. 156. "May the Lord enkindle in us the fire of His love, and the flame of eternal charity." (*Ibid.*)

P. 158.

"For the Good which is the object of the will
Therein is wholly gathered, and outside it
That is defective, which therein is perfect."

(*Paradiso*, xxxiii. 103.)

P. 159. "The Virgin that childed mounted into heaven, the little rod of Jesse, not without body but without time, she entendeth to be there." (Caxton's *Golden Legend*: The Assumption of our Lady.)

P. 160. "Mary Virgin was caught up to the heavenly habitations, where the King of kings sitteth on His starry throne." (Roman Breviary: First Vespers of the Assumption Antiphon.)

P. 163. "He hath exalted the humble." (Luke i. 52.)

P. 173.

"There is the Rose, wherein which the Word Divine
Made itself flesh."

(*Paradiso*, xxx. 73.)

P. 174.

"Within the Gold of the Eternal Rose
Which doth expand rank on rank and exhaleth
Perfume of praise to the Sun of everlasting spring."

(*Ibid.*, xxx. 124.)

Ibid. "Lowly and exalted more than any creature." (*Ibid.*, xxxiii. 2.)

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